SHORT STORIES

No. 749.] Week ending May 9th, 1903. [Price One Penny.

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(A Dramatic Incident from the Story, "Saving the Situation." See inside.)

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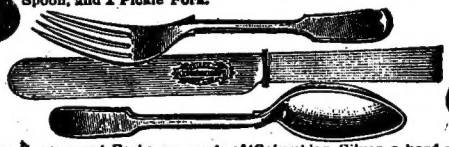

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SHORT STORIES

No. 749.] [ONE PENNY.

Week Ending May 9th, 1903.

This Story Contains the Incident Depicted on the Cover.

SAVING THE SITUATION.

Telling of How a Girl Saved her Father from Ruin.

"RENE!"

"Yes, dad!"

Irene Woodhouse raised her eyes somewhat languidly from the book she was reading, and glanced at her father in response to his utterance of her name; she was roused from her lethargy to something like alertness by the anxious look on his striking countenance.

"Did you want me? Is anything troubling you?" she inquired tenderly, leaving her seat on the couch and standing before him.

"Nothing particular, my dear!" he replied evasively. "I was thinking. You see, you are old enough now to be turning your thoughts to marriage, to finding a protector for the time when I shall not be here! Oh, I shall not live for ever!" he added with a forced smile, as Irene shook her head. "I fancied—well, I had an idea—Don't you think that young Rawson rather likes you? That would be a good match; old Major Rawson has money, and it will all go to Cuthbert, and——"

"I don't want money! I must marry a man whom I can love, and I cannot conceive that I shall ever love Cuthbert Rawson. You know, dad—at least, I thought you knew—that he and I are at daggers drawn, in a friendly way, so to say. No, it wouldn't be Cuthbert Rawson, at any rate!"

"Oh, well. Let that rest, my dear! We will dismiss the subject."

So saying, Mr. Woodhouse rose, kissed his pretty and affectionate daughter, and left the room. Irene seated herself again, and took up her book, but she did not read; there was something on her father's mind, and she was uneasy.

"If I were reading a novel," mused Rene, "I should at once jump to the conclusion that the heroine's father was bankrupt, and was just struggling to keep up appearances and get his daughter married, so that she should not be left penniless. But it cannot be so in the present case.

"Firstly, I have an annuity settled on myself; not a large one, but sufficient to keep me from seeking a situation as companion or a similar post.

"Secondly, father has a pension as a retired Civil Servant who held a good position, besides money of his own. So if he had squandered all his own money, his pension would keep us going in our present fairly modest style. Now what is it?"

Irene could not rid herself of her feeling of vague anxiety. All through that day it beset her, she passed a restless night, and during the next day the uneasiness increased. That is the natural result of brooding over any trouble, real or imaginary.

"I feel there was something in that remark about my marrying Cuthbert Rawson!" she said decidedly, during the afternoon. "It was a strange thing to say, in the circumstances. I cannot endure this any longer. I must know what is wrong!"

Irene Woodhouse was pretty, as already mentioned; she was a girl of determination, which often induces an expression of countenance calculated to decrease good looks in a woman; and she was possessed of intelligence rather above the average, but not sufficiently above the ordinary level to entitle her to be described as brilliant. She might shine in a quiet way, but she would not dazzle.

She went straight to her father, whom she found in a small room gazing vacantly out of the window, and addressed him with a directness that took him completely off his guard.

"Father, there is something wrong, and you must tell me all about it at once. I have a right to know!"

Mr. Woodhouse sprang to his feet in alarm, and in doing so he tacitly confessed that Irene was right in her assumption.

"Sit down, father," she said, quietly and decisively, "and tell me all. I can bear trouble."

"You cannot bear this, my child!" said the old man, breaking down entirely and covering his face with his hands. "It's the disgrace! I would sooner be penniless, but—I will tell you all!"

He dried his eyes, which had filled with the bitter tears of mortification and remorse, and told her briefly.

"Mrs. Warren, my cousin, left a sum of money invested in Consols. I was to have the benefit of the interest till you were twenty-one, after which the Consols were to be handed over to a soldiers' benevolent fund, of which Major Rawson is treasurer. The Consols were handed over to me in trust.

"I suppose I was stupid, but it occurred to me three years ago that I could do better with the money than let it remain in Consols, and, as there was nothing in the will to the contrary, I sold out and invested in other securities. I made more interest, but I did not want it for myself; it was my fixed intention to make money for the fund, so that I could hand over more than was given to me. So I set aside the additional interest and was glad. Oh, what a dolt I was! The new investment went wrong and most of the trust money was gone!

"I tried speculation with the remainder and with my own money, but I was unsuccessful! I now stand in this position: I have to hand over that money in two months or be branded as a defaulter!"

"But we can raise money!" cried Irene, pale as death. "My annuity can be commuted, for the office will buy me out for a lump sum. We can sell the furniture and all we have. We——"

Her father interrupted her.

"That is not enough! And if it were, the very fact that we

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are selling would betray us, and the disgrace would be as great. They could not prosecute me, but they would brand me as a criminal all the same. I should most probably lose my pension too. I did it innocently, but they will not believe that. Major Rawson would seize the opportunity, for he has never forgiven me for siding with his opponent at the last General Election."

Irene stood like a marble statue; her cheeks were white, her eyelids were closed. All her nerves were strained.

"Why did you make that remark about Cuthbert Rawson?" she asked suddenly. "Considering all things, it is strange that you should hint at marriage with him."

"Because had it been possible it would have saved the situation!" was the reply. "If you were engaged or married to Cuthbert the Major would place things in the best light, instead of the worst. He would help us out of the trouble. It is not as if I were a thief, Irene. But the marriage is out of the question, and we must prepare to sell and bear the consequences of my foolishness!"

"Perhaps all will be well," said Irene, after a long pause, during which she had kept her eyes closed. The lids were raised now, and revealed a peculiar glitter, a kind of wintry gleam, in the usually bright eyes. "Leave it to me, and do as I wish; we may weather this storm, father."

Irene had formulated a plan, which she set herself to carry out with the utmost deliberateness. The love which she bore her father, a love that almost amounted to worship, overwhelmed all other considerations, and changed temporarily the character of her being.

She felt no kind of love for Cuthbert Rawson; they had often met and conversed, but it was like flint striking against steel, it produced sparks. They might have admired each other in a way, but the idea of love was not likely to enter the head of either Cuthbert or Irene.

Moreover Irene had noticed quite lately that Cuthbert appeared to be falling a victim to the charms of a new member of their circle, an accomplished daughter of an Anglo-Indian official, Miss Maude Page.

"She has more chance than I should ever have had," said Irene in a tone that sounded harsh. "She is decidedly brilliant, and he likes a brilliant woman! Well, all's fair in love and war!" she added with a reckless laugh. "I must win Cuthbert Rawson! I don't love him, but I can become as good a wife as any other woman, so I shall be doing him no injustice, and—I shall save father! I'll do it!"

Anyone who could have gazed upon Irene Woodhouse at that moment and peered into the inmost depths of her being would have pitied rather than have blamed her. She was changed completely, and she was about to make the attempt to immolate herself on the altar of filial devotion.

It was a season of festivities, and the Woodhouses were not behind in the giving of parties. The select circle wondered somewhat at this, for the Woodhouses had lived rather quietly; but they did not worry themselves much about it. They were satisfied with the fact that it was another source of amusement and pleasure, and they gladly accepted the invitations. Thus it came about that, by means of her own functions and those of her friends, Irene secured many opportunities of meeting Cuthbert Rawson.

In spite of all her efforts she felt that she had made no progress with him on the first two occasions. Miss Maude Page was decidedly attractive; she was a grand conversationalist, not very deep, but witty and entertaining, and Irene saw that she was behind the woman whom she intended to oust. There was a steely glitter as she went home after the second meeting.

The next occasion on which the two met Cuthbert Rawson was involuntarily attracted to his "dear enemy," as he secretly and smilingly called her.

"May I have the pleasure of the next waltz, Miss Woodhouse?" he asked, bending over her. "That is, if it is not taken?"

"It is at your disposal, Mr. Rawson," she said, with a mocking smile. "That is, if we can hold together for as many minutes as the waltz lasts; I always think that you and I are like positive and negative electricity! There seems to be attraction mixed with repelling force!"

She laughed merrily, and her eyes flashed at him with unusual fire. She seemed to be quivering with life and energy; he was fascinated.

"I don't understand about electricity, and I am not sure that you are right in your comparison, Miss Woodhouse. I believe, candidly, that your knowledge of the subject is as shaky as mine. I believe in personal magnetism, though. Hallo, I must be off for this dance! We'll discuss it during the waltz."

Irene was also claimed for the dance, and her partner was charmed by her sparkling talk.

"Never knew her to be like that before!" he observed to his friend Rawson, after the dance. "She sparkles; that's the best way to describe it."

Rawson's curiosity was aroused; some other feeling also made itself manifest in him, although he did not understand it. He kept his eyes constantly seeking Irene, and he waited with some impatience for the waltz. Even Miss Maude Page failed to prove so attractive as hitherto.

"This is our dance, Miss Woodhouse," he said, bowing low as he stood before her. "Now we can discuss the question of——"

He did not finish the sentence, for the band struck up the first bars of a particularly dreamy waltz, and they placed themselves in position. Fortune favoured Irene, for, by some awkwardness, he did not hold her correctly.

"I am positive that my simile was correct!" she said with a bewitching little laugh. "The music serves as a force of attraction, but something within you repels, or you would not be so awkward!"

"I believe you are right!" he retorted, catching the infection of her animation. "However, it is possible to overcome the force of repulsion—that is the correct term, I believe—but it's an ugly word! I wonder why you and I always strike fire when we meet, Miss Woodhouse?"

"Because we are kindred spirits, Mr. Rawson!" she flashed back. "If we were not we should not produce a flame!"

"Good, there is something in that!" he laughed. "This is a grand waltz, and you dance it perfectly. I wonder why we have not waltzed together before? Oh, I give in!" he added quickly, as her lips parted. "I have never asked you, you will say! I suppose I have not, which is my fault and my misfortune combined!"

"Am I not to be counted as sharing in the misfortune?" she queried, with assumed demureness.

"If you wish it, yes!" he rejoined gallantly. "I will take care that we are not companions in misfortune again, Miss Woodhouse!"

The waltz ended, he led her to a secluded seat; he was in no hurry to surrender possession of his enchanting partner, and he secured two other dances before he relinquished her. Those dances were looked forward to with such eagerness that Miss Page secretly voted him "flat."

That was the beginning of the drama. Rene's game of conquest had begun in real earnest, and she never let her hold loosen. Her brilliancy became the talk of Society; she charmed everybody; even old Major Rawson, despite his bitterness towards Mr. Woodhouse, spoke of her as "a really charming girl," and looked not unfavourably upon his son's attentions to her.

"I'd sooner the boy married someone else," he said to himself, "but if that's his choice, why, let him go ahead, and I'll put up with Woodhouse as a relation by marriage!"

The servants, who saw how absent their young mistress was on the occasion of a function at home, and heard of her from other servants, said that she exhausted herself during those special hours, for she was always dull, and often lying down when there was nothing going on.

For the space of five weeks this went on. Mr. Woodhouse became more and more depressed as the fatal time drew near. He saw but little of his daughter's actions, for he usually retired to a quiet room with some of his old friends when he had escorted his daughter to a social function

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He saw that Irene was becoming pale and worn, and he marvelled at the change between this condition and her appearance when she was going out.

"We must give it up, Irene," he said sorrowfully one morning. "I do not know what plan or idea you had in your head five weeks ago, when I told you all, but the time is nearly up, and I—we—must prepare for the blow to fall!"

"Wait!" said Irene enigmatically. Her dull eye lighted up with animation for an instant. "Wait till to-morrow!'

In her own room she paced up and down feverishly.

"I feel that the proposal will come to-night during the ball which I am giving. I cannot go on much longer. I will marry him, and then——"

She caught sight of herself in a mirror and the shock made the words die away. She seemed almost to have become an old woman.

"I must discontinue it as soon as my object is accomplished," she breathed with intense emotion. "Will he soon tire of his bride? And I? What will it be for me? I do not love him! Love him?" she added strangely. "Do I love him?"

She passed her hand over her forehead, which was burning, then pressed both hands to her heart. She shuddered at nothing tangible, and hurried about her duties.

It was a splendid scene that evening, and some of the guests whispered that they didn't quite see how the Woodhouses could run to it; they comforted themselves with the reflection that it was a special effort, of course, for which the host would have to pay by retrenchment of a severe character during the following few months.

Irene did the duties magnificently; she was the belle of the evening, and she excelled every woman there by her piquant, vivacious manner, and her conversational powers. Rawson was enchanted, he claimed so many dances that Irene had to cry "Hold!" and cut his claims down to a minimum.

During the interval, while the guests were taking refreshments, Rene stole away, leaving her father and a widowed lady of the vicinity—a great friend—to do the honours. Her brain seemed on fire, all her nerves were aching under the extreme tension, she felt that she was on the verge of a paroxysm of hysteria.

"I feared it!" she murmured. "It would be a repetition of what occurred ten days ago, but I have prepared for it! I must not fail now! I must win to-night, or I may lose for ever! Oh, my head, my whole body is throbbing, throbbing, throbbing!"

She hurried to a small room at the back of the house. From a corner cupboard she took something and placed it on the table. She shuddered as she did so.

The secret of her wit and meteoric brilliancy lay revealed there. She had learnt much about drugs from her father, who always kept a stock of them.

She knew that a certain decoction, in which arsenic figured, was a powerful exhilarator, she knew that the fearfully dangerous potion was able to draw out all the latent talent, all the hidden mental faculties, and transform for the time a person of apparently ordinary capacity into a genius, or something very near it.

In a minor degree such drugs are used in France and America, but the decoction taken by Irene Woodhouse to effect her purpose was more potent in its results, for the reason that it had an Indian drug mixed with it.

Naturally, such artificial stimulants have their after effects, leaving the victim dull and heavy, and this fact explains the lassitude shown by Irene on the days following the social gatherings in which she shone so brightly.

But there was another danger, that of over-excitation of the nerves, and a collapse in the very midst of triumph. To prevent this, Irene had retired to the little room to prepare a hypodermic injection of morphine. She knew that the combined effects of the two drugs would kill her if she continued their use, but the game was nearly finished, that night would see victory or defeat!

She was so intent on her preparations that she did not hear a knock at the door or her name softly uttered—"Irene!" It was Cuthbert Rawson, who had seen her steal away, and had tried to follow her, so that he might lead her away to a secluded nook and tell her that he loved her to distraction. He had seen her disappear in that room which, he knew, she used as a reading and work-room on other occasions.

He waited in the corridor for her, but as she did not reappear he ventured to the door, and called her by name. Ah, she would understand that he loved her if she heard him call her "Irene!" No answer. He gently pushed open the door and looked in; perhaps he had been mistaken after all, and the room was empty.

What he saw stupefied him with amazement. Irene was about to administer a hypodermic injection of morphine, and she was talking audibly to herself, unconsciously telling Cuthbert Rawson all the miserable secret.

He stepped up to her, causing her to drop the syringe with a cry of fear.

"Why have you done this, Irene?" he asked, his voice indicating great sorrow.

She gazed at him blankly for a moment, then fell on her knees before him with a convulsive sob, hiding her face for shame.

"Why did you do it?" he asked again, gently. He raised her to her feet, drew her hands from her face, and waited for her reply.

With flaming cheeks she told him the whole story. She narrated her father's foolishness, and how she determined to save him in the way he had unintentionally suggested—by winning Cuthbert Rawson.

"I knew that I must be brilliant, charming, enchanting if I wished to accomplish my object!" she confessed. "And that I was not to be compared with others. So I adopted this device to aid me. Now leave me to despise myself as you despise me. No, stay, while I tell all, in justice to myself!

"I did it to save my father! Yes, but afterwards I did it because—because I had learnt to love you, and I wanted you for yourself, and for my own happiness. I have lost all, and my father is ruined, my happiness gone!"

She threw herself on the ground and sobbed in an agony of grief. She was oblivious of everything. The paroxysm lasted for five or six minutes, and all this time the guests were making merry, unconscious of the tragic scene that was being enacted so close to them. Irene's sobs moderated, and she essayed to rise; she felt a strong arm pass round her waist, and the next moment she was in Cuthbert Rawson's embrace.

"No, no!" she pleaded. "Leave me!"

"Poor child!" he said tenderly. "Your devotion to your father covers a multitude of foolishness on your own part. No one will know, dear, except myself, and why should I complain of something that has brought us together? If you have sinned, you did it against me, and if I forgive, what remains?"

"Will you ever be able to forgive me?" she asked humbly.

"Of course! Especially if you promise to be as devoted in your love to me as you have shown yourself in your love to your father! And you may rest easy about the other matter. I can arrange that, and will gladly do so in order to secure a wife whom I can love and admire for her goodness!"

Irene did not return to her guests, and her absence was explained as due to a sudden but slight indisposition.

When the guests had departed Rawson took Mr. Woodhouse aside and asked for Irene. When she came, Cuthbert said significantly—

"I have asked your daughter to marry me, sir, and I hope for your consent. Irene will tell you all when I am gone. I know all, and it increases my love for her. The past is dead; the future is bright!"

F. Brewster.

Tupman: "I hear that you are building a new house?" Snodgrass: "Yes, I couldn't very well build an old one, you know."

He: "What is the name of your machine?" She: "Do you mean the name the maker gives it, or the names papa called it when he fell over it in the hall the night before last?"

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The Romance of Ina.

A Very Pathetic Love Story.

"I THINK that's all, nurse, I'll take you up now. You understand that it is a very trying case. That is the chief reason why"—the doctor's face broadened into a kindly smile—"I wish you to undertake it."

"I am very flattered that you choose me; you know the harder the work the better it suits me."

"Exactly, but don't overdo yourself. We can't have you a patient on our hands."

Nurse Ina only shook her head in reply. She was, as she herself expressed it, "hatefully strong"; in all her years of nursing she had not had a day's illness.

An excellent nurse was the general opinion, but—not a pleasant woman. The face beneath the dainty cap was worn and stern, not through physical suffering, and the steel grey eyes were hard as flint. It is not often that one sees an elderly nurse; the neat and dainty uniform is almost always associated with that youth and freshness to which it is so becoming.

Nurse Ina was some way past forty, and betrayed the fact in every line of her haggard face, that was wrinkled beyond her years. No trace of the beauty that had once been hers remained, save the masses of wavy hair, whose reddish hue Time had scarcely begun to change to grey.

The unthinking called her cold and cynical; she was respected by all, however, liked by a few, loved by none.

Not that she seemed to yearn for affection in any form; she went on her way doing her duty with a kind of fierce ardour that made her a favourite with doctors, who found no task was too hard, too unpalatable or onerous for the untiring zeal of Nurse Ina.

The patient she was called upon to attend was a man suffering from a fever, and whose ravings had frightened his first nurse almost into hysterics, rendering her absolutely useless. The doctor had sent her back with a sharp reprimand, and having a grateful recollection of Nurse Ina's capabilities, had sought her out, and been fortunate enough to find her disengaged.

"You won't be frightened like Sister Mary," he said to her, half humorously, as he led her through the silent, carpeted passages to the sick room. "You won't fail me?"

"I don't think so," said Nurse Ina calmly; "I am to undertake the case alone?"

"Yes, if you can. Here we are. Poor fellow, he is quiet enough now."

The large room was dimly lit by a couple of shaded candles; it looked vast and lonely with the bed in the middle, on which the sharp outline of a motionless figure was just distinguishable. Another doctor stood beside it, he came forward to speak to his colleague, bestowing a glance of keen scrutiny on the nurse.

"No change," he murmured, in the subdued key of a voice trained to sick rooms, "and for some time there will be none. This is the new nurse?"

"Yes. One on whom we can have perfect reliance."

Ina stepped softly to the bedside, and looked down upon her patient with perfect calmness. His was a handsome and delicately moulded face that illness could not rob of its beauty. The nurse frowned as she stooped and laid her hand upon the low, broad forehead. The eyes were shut; she wished uneasily that he would open them, and show her that she was mistaken in the sudden thought that had passed through her brain, but the heavy lids remained closed.

"You will have no one to interfere with you in any way," said the doctor who knew her. "He is a bachelor, and his relations seem to trouble but little about him."

Nurse Ina looked again at the blank face on the pillow; that haunting likeness was still more apparent.

"What is his name?" she asked slowly.

"Lindsay, Edgar Lindsay. Anything else you want to know?"

"Nothing else, thank you."

"Then we'll leave you. I shall be in later. Good-bye for the present."

"An invaluable woman," he said to his colleague, as they made their way downstairs, out into the street, where the straw was laid to deaden the steady roar of the traffic. "I have absolute confidence in her."

At the instant when he spoke the "invaluable woman" was lying prone upon the floor, weeping as she had not wept for twenty long years, since that day when she and Edgar Lindsay had parted, as each declared, "for ever."

And as her sobs echoed through the silent room the sick man began to talk, to laugh, to sing in a feeble, raucous voice that was horrible to hear. Nurse Ina, dashing away her tears, went to him.

As she looked at the face that during so many weary years had been ever present with her, she was conscious of a curious pang that *he* should have altered so little, whilst she——!

"He would never have recognised *me*," she thought sadly, "he never will."

The patient opened wide, unseeing eyes upon her, bright with the fever that was consuming him.

"It's all my fault—and yet—you didn't love me, or you wouldn't let these awful little beasts get hold of me, they're pulling me into the sea, and you won't hold me. Help me—or I shall be gone down, down, and it's all slimy, and I can see snakes and snakes—and nothing but snakes, and they'll stifle me, they will! One's coiling across my mouth, another's crushing my arm—oh—oh—hold me, hold me; put out your hand—just touch mine, only touch mine, only touch me! That's all—I'm slipping—sliding——"

He threw out his hands with a scream, and Nurse Ina took

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them in her strong grasp and supported him in her arms, resting the poor weary head against her shoulder.

For a few seconds her soothing personality quieted him, he lay quiescent, even seemed to rest, but suddenly he tore himself away, and began once more to chatter, to rave of the horrible visions that tortured him, breaking into scraps of song, quoting poetry, and all without rest or intermission, till Ina grew dizzy and confused as she listened.

The doctor paid his promised visit and looked very serious, the nurse knew that look upon his face, and her heart sickened within her.

"He is worse," she forced herself to say quietly, though her life seemed to depend on the answer.

"He is," said the doctor gravely, "I fear, I very much fear. I think his people ought to be notified as to the serious state he is in."

"Why, he has no people," spoke Ina passionately, and without thinking. "At least none who care for him. Leave him to me, I——"

She stopped, conscious that the doctor was regarding her curiously.

"I knew him—once, years ago," she said more quietly. "He is very much alone in the world. The relations he has, you yourself said, do not trouble much about him."

"True; but they must know," said the doctor thoughtfully. "He is very rich, you know, nurse, and his money interests them, of that we may be sure."

"I hate money," answered Ina bitterly, turning away. She was thinking how it had parted them over twenty years ago. How the suspicion implanted in Edgar Lindsay's mind by disappointed and poor relations had grown and flourished till it had finally blossomed out into full vigour, in that scene when he had accused her of loving his income, not himself, and she had sworn never to forgive the insult.

"I hate money," she repeated half to herself, "it brings on moral paralysis of the heart, it kills all good feelings."

"Rather sweeping," observed the doctor mildly. "There's nothing more to be done, nurse. We'll pull him through if we can."

"Yes," said Ina in a low voice, "we *will*."

It was even to her, used to many sad nights, a ghastly vigil; had she been attending a stranger it would have been painful; that the patient was the one creature in the whole world whom she loved made her task one of torture to her.

As the hours went by, he seemed to be slipping away from her, the little thread of life was growing so slender; the only consolation was that his poor voice was hushed; he was almost too weak, as it seemed, to draw his breath.

As the grey dawn stole silently into the room, and the sooty sparrows outside on the leads welcomed it with cheerful chirpings, Ina had her reward, so she thought, for the many years of sad unlovedness, the heart-hunger she had endured.

For a feeble ray of light fell upon her weary, tear-worn face, as she bent over him, and there came a gleam of consciousness into Edgar Lindsay's beautiful eyes, he gazed at her steadily; she saw he was surprised or puzzled, then a sudden look of perfect rest and happiness appeared, he moved his lips, and Ina heard a weak whisper:

"Ina, my Ina, have you forgiven me?"

The next instant he was delirious once more, her name mingling with incoherent ravings, but Ina could not for an instant doubt that he had recognised her.

"He loves me still," she told herself, and it seemed to her that her happiness was too wonderful to exist. She never doubted for an instant that he would live now. She was fighting a duel with death, in which her great, overwhelming love was her weapon. Who could resist it?

He would live and learn how Fate had brought them together in the strangest fashion, and the life that both had wasted, for want of a little unselfish power of forgiving, should be lived at last. Dayspring had been denied them, but the afterglow of a sad autumn was, however, to be theirs.

It was even sweet to hear how he reproached himself for their sad quarrel.

"All my fault, Ina," he moaned, "all my fault, and you're letting me die, you won't save me, though I love you. Yes, I love you and yet I hurt you, and I was glad; I liked to; at least—— Oh, Heaven, I didn't *mean* to lose you. You mustn't leave me, Ina—Ina, don't you see I'm sinking down, down into this awful crevasse all for want of you. It's all blackness at the bottom, and above it's light, and I can see you. And if you would, you could save me; oh, don't let me go, hold me tight, tight, tight! I want to live now, for you love me."

His grasp on Ina's hand was agony, but it was a pain she delighted in.

"Dearest, you are safe, I am with you," she said soothingly. "Oh, Edgar, if I hadn't been utterly selfish, I should never have left you, never."

"I love you, I love you, I love you," he muttered hoarsely. "I can't say that often enough; I love—I love——"

His voice drifted away into incoherent mutterings, died away into perfect silence, and to Ina's exquisite joy he fell asleep. She knelt beside him, for he was holding her hands, and she dared not move, watching the haggard look slowly die away from his face, leaving it calm and peaceful, and listening to his breathing as it grew more regular.

"He is asleep," she whispered to the doctor, as he entered. "Oh, there is a chance now?"

And the doctor thought he had never seen a more beautiful face when it wore that smile than that of the faded, elderly nurse.

"Many chances," he said kindly, "but you must be knocked up, though I must confess I never saw you look so well. Night-nursing evidently agrees with you."

Ina actually blushed, and looked almost ten years younger.

The improvement in the patient's condition was maintained all day, and though the nurse's heart was never rejoiced by another sign of recognition, her contentment was absolute. She had conquered, death had retired defeated, and Edgar was hers once more.

It was growing dusk, and Edgar was asleep, when a servant came to Nurse Ina, and asked her if she could go downstairs to speak to a lady who was inquiring after Mr. Lindsay.

The nurse hesitated.

"If she won't keep me long," she said dubiously, "I can just speak two words to her."

In the great drawing-room she was confronted by a very dazzling vision, a creature all golden hair and appealing brown eyes, and wearing a gown that was the acme of ruinous simplicity.

"Oh, nurse, I am so sorry to disturb you"—the voice was as sweet as the face—"but, how is Mr. Lindsay? I never heard till I came to town yesterday that he was ill."

"He is better, I am glad to say," said Ina, wondering who this exquisite little person could be. "In fact, he is out of danger."

"Out of danger! And I—I had not the slightest idea that—that—— Oh, nurse, how dreadful! How thankful I am I came!"

There were tears in the lovely eyes, and Ina looked on, whilst her visitor dried them without the least affectation.

"Perhaps," said the sweet voice—"perhaps I had better tell you who I am, or you must think me very strange. But the fact is—Mr. Lindsay and I are engaged.

"You look surprised," she added a little petulantly, "but I don't know why you should. I am nearly twenty-two, and

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he is—oh—there isn't a young man to be named in the same day with him."

She looked at the nurse, who had not said a word; she thought she had never seen a living person so absolutely colourless, even the lips were clay-colour, and she decided that nursing must be an unhealthy occupation.

"Perhaps," the gracious vision began, with just a faint touch of hesitation—"perhaps I'd better tell you that—that Mr. Lindsay and I quarrelled just before he was ill. It was all my fault," she said penitently, "I was horrid. I didn't hear from him for some time, till quite casually last night at a party someone mentioned that he was very ill.

"You can imagine how wretched I was. I determined to come and find out for myself, but I could not get away till now. And then you tell me he is 'out of danger.' To think that I nearly lost him; that I never knew!"

Ina regarded her visitor stupidly. She could scarcely grasp the meaning of the latter's flow of words. Engaged—Edgar Lindsay—on whose lips *her* name had ever been during his delirium, who had, she was persuaded, recognised her, and addressed her in terms of the deepest affection, he engaged to this beautiful, dainty being, who was young enough to be his daughter! It was inconceivable! Desperately she clung to the last vestige of the happiness which was drifting away from her.

"*You* are going to marry Mr. Lindsay," she said, "you?"

"Yes, and oh, nurse, I want you to do me a favour"—the appealing brown eyes were brought to bear on the nurse's impassive countenance. "Here is a letter, only a tiny note, containing just two words. When he is well enough, give it to him. He will understand it—it will make it all right."

Ina conquered a wild desire to tear the offered missive into many pieces, as she took it from the little outstretched hand.

"You are making no mistake," she said, "you are sure Mr. Lindsay will understand?"

"Of course." The girl looked a little surprised. "Why, nurse, I hope—I think that my note will do him more good than all the doctor's stuff in the world."

"I don't understand," murmured the nurse wildly. "Oh, what does it mean?"

"And," continued the other happily, "you will come down to me every day, won't you, nurse, and tell me how he is? I shall be *so* anxious till he is out of danger."

The nurse laid her hand heavily on the silken shoulder, her haggard eyes gazed full at the smiling, daintily-beautiful face.

"Tell me your name," she said hoarsely. "Quick, quick!"

For a sudden awful thought had come to her, and she stood motionless as the rock from which her features seemed carved, as the girl answered:

"My name is Ina—Ina Colquhoun."

Sybil Campbell Lethbridge.

The Rose's False Message.

And How the True One was Given.

With many wild whoops, and much leaping and tumbling, the children hurried out of the weather-beaten school house and took their several ways towards their homes in various parts of the sparsely settled neighbourhood.

A moment later Millie Forrest, the teacher, came out and, hurrying across the playground, turned into the long lane, bordered with high banks and hedges.

Small, slender, with big brown eyes, an oval face with irregular features, the young "teacher" was not what one would call pretty, but there was a piquant arch to the red lips, and the heavy mass of nut-brown hair that overhung her brows was a glory in itself sufficient to have awakened envy.

She hurried along the lane and turned through a wicket gate into a small copse. Following a winding path, crossed by deep shadows cast from the trees by the declining sun, she was halfway through the wood when Edgar Sommers, a neighbour's son, came from the clump of bushes and with a show of bashfulness, joined her.

"Evening, Millie," he said, after an embarrassing silence. "Had a good day at the school?"

"Much the same as all other days," replied the girl, with a defiant lifting of her head. "I am tired of it all. I wonder if everyone finds life such a dreary round? Sometimes I wish might fall into the old mill pond yonder with no one near to rescue me."

The young man's eyes grew moist and his lips trembled perceptibly.

"Is it so dull and stupid for you here, Millie?" he said slowly. "I—I wish I might do something to make things brighter and—and sweeter for you."

The girl turned her face away that he might not see the sudden light that came into her eyes and the flush that coloured her brown cheek.

"I'm rough and awkward," he continued, lengthening his stride to keep up with the girl's quickened step, "not worthy of you in any way, Millie, but—I love you, love you more than my life, more than a thousand lives. If you would only give me the right, I would do as much as a man could do to make you happy."

She was going forward rapidly, nervously, her head lifted and a look of gladness in her eyes. Had he seen it he would have taken her in his arms, then and there, and settled the question for ever. But he did not see it and her silence was like death to his hopes.

A wild rose nodding and blushing beside the path caught his eye, and stooping, he plucked it from the bush.

"See, Millie, the last of the season; let the flower plead for me. I won't ask you to decide now, but you are going to the dance over at Major Barlow's to-night. If you think you could trust me and let me love and care for you, wear it in your hair."

He held out the rose to her and she took it demurely from his big, brown fingers.

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"If you wear the flower to-night, you will make me the happiest man in the world," he said, in a half whisper. "If you don't, you will break my heart."

He stood for a moment gazing with longing eyes upon the slender figure of the girl going on, with the warm sunlight turning her bronze hair to gold. Then he went back heavily along the path, and passed through the meadows lying beyond the copse, and by the old water mill.

As he passed the mill he saw Frisbie, the new miller from the city, standing in the doorway, his curling hair white with flour dust. Edgar could not but acknowledge him a handsome fellow and remembering how often he had been a visitor at the Forrests' since he came to the neighbourhood, he answered the young miller's hearty greeting gruffly and passed on.

Millie went through the woods softly humming to herself:

"Give me a kiss that, going home,
My feet may walk on air."

She dressed herself with unusual care for the evening, and when she was ready put the wild rose in her hair. The dance was to be only a friendly party, and she would go over early and be with the Barlow girls when the others came.

As she tripped into the little sitting-room she met her mother going with a jug for water. Millie took the vessel from her mother and ran lightly down the slope. Stooping, she dipped the jug into the spring. In the dusk the clear, undisturbed waters shone like silver.

As she lifted her full jug and turned to retrace her steps, the rose slipped from her hair, and, falling into the spring brook, was carried swiftly out of sight.

The happy girl did not miss the pretty token until well on her way to Major Barlow's. It was too late then to go back to look for it, and she went on framing many pretty excuses for not having the rose in her hair to be seen when Edgar should come.

It was nearly nine o'clock and the full moon was shining when Edgar Sommers, on his way to the dance, reached the narrow footbridge that crossed the spring brook. He was anxious and despondent.

His great love made him timid and cast a halo about the object of his affection. It seemed impossible that she should care for him.

He stood for a moment on the bridge looking down into the moonlit water. A bright object, dancing on the ripples, caught his eye. It whirled over the tiny rapids and lodged against the roots of a willow.

Edgar sprang over the low rail of the bridge and snatched from the water the rose he had given Millie a few hours before.

Here, then, was her answer to his pleading. She had thrown it away, and the spring brook brought it to save him the humiliation of meeting a more direct refusal from her lips.

He was dumb with the sudden overthrow of his hopes, and walked on aimlessly, the rose crushed in his hand.

Suddenly the strain of a violin playing the "Beautiful Blue Danube" fell on his ears. He had come unconsciously to where she was.

He would have turned back, but could not. A desire to look upon her face once more before he went for ever away, drew him on until he stood in the shadow of the creeper that ran over the doorway of the Barlows' house.

The door was open, and he saw the gay couples floating about the big dining-room. Millie was dancing with the new miller, and they glided on to the rise and fall of the music, the handsomest couple in the room.

How Edgar hated the man! He longed to stretch out his hand, take the white throat of his rival between his strong fingers and crush out his life. It was for this unknown, smooth-voiced stranger that she had thrown him over.

But she did not love him, so what matter who claimed her. He turned away and was soon hidden in the shadow of the woods that skirted the stream below the house.

Millie waited impatiently for Edgar's coming. She had determined to go to him as soon as he arrived and tell him of the loss of the rose and acknowledge her intention to have worn it. He would forgive her seeming carelessness when he knew she loved him; she felt sure of that. But as the hours wore on and he did not come, she became restless and frightened. What could have happened to detain him?

At last the people prepared to go home, and the miller offered to escort her across the fields. She would have refused him, but there was no good excuse.

There was no one else to accompany her, and so the two went out across the meadows. He gay and confident, she sad and apprehensive.

As they were going over the rustic bridge where Edgar had found the rose the young man suddenly threw his arm about Millie's waist, and, drawing her close, said:

"Toll, little one, that is the country custom, isn't it? Come, give me a kiss for toll!"

"Let me go!" she cried, and struggled to free herself.

"Not until I have taken toll," he replied, bending over her. "It is my right, you know."

Before the now frightened girl could cry out there was a quick step on the bridge, and a big, brown hand fell on the shoulder of the miller, and he turned to face the tall young farmer. The girl ran to the end of the bridge and stood trembling with fright.

The two men faced each other on the narrow bridge. The moon, far down in the west, cast a mellow light on the scene.

Edgar was the first to speak, and his voice had in it the ring of steel.

"Millie," said he, "has this—fellow the right to offer to kiss you?"

"You know he hasn't." She stood straight now, and her brown eyes flashed, then her manner changed suddenly.

"Don't strike him, Edgar. Let him go. You are to blame. If you had come as you promised this would not have happened."

"And the rose," said he, "I found it here in the brook."

"It was in my hair when I left home. Oh, Edgar, I understand; you — you thought I threw it away!" She was close by his side now.

"And you didn't?"

"I would have sacrificed my life first."

"Thank God!"

And when they looked again they were alone.

Audrey Templeton.

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Her Wedding Gown.

Telling of a Jealous Woman's Attempted Revenge.

THE modiste called it a ravishing confection. It would, she averred, suit mademoiselle's fair beauty to perfection—the young dressmaker who had designed it would be proud of her work when she saw it on mademoiselle. Yes, she was a good worker, and she had the artistic taste and eye which made the successful designer.

Mademoiselle—otherwise Miss Helena Vernon—nodded haughtily. She had examined with care the lovely reflection in the long pier glass before her, touching with critical fingers the exquisite folds of shimmering white satin which swept the soft, velvety carpet of the room in the establishment of the fashionable modiste to whom the beauty of the season had intrusted the making of her wedding gown. It was perfection, and she permitted herself to smile upon Madame Noelle.

"With the slight alteration which I told you of, it can be sent home without fail to-morrow?" she said, taking a last look at the graceful sweep of the magnificent train veiled in priceless lace.

"But certainly; mademoiselle shall have it without fail to-morrow. If the alteration may be arranged now while mademoiselle has it on?"

She rang a bell, and gave a whispered order to the silk-attired woman who answered the great modiste's summons, and Miss Vernon continued to admire herself in the glass with great satisfaction.

She would certainly be handed down to posterity as the bride of the season; the dress was but the finishing touch to her glorious beauty; and as she was making the match of the year she had, of course, good cause for her self-congratulation.

She turned as a door opened to admit a girl in a soft black dress, who bore the insignia of her trade, scissors and pincushion, in her hand. Miss Vernon's haughty glance swept her for an instant; she noted the beauty of the girl's clear, pale complexion—like a magnolia newly-opened—the warm colour of her bronze hair. And the sight angered her, as the sight of any beauty always angered her—other than her own, that is to say.

There was that indescribable air of good birth about this young creature with the gleaming scissors and well-filled pincushion, to which Helena Vernon could never attain—be she prospective Countess of Endsley a thousand times over—she was but *nouveau riche* after all, and the Earl had well counted her "dollars," as he himself termed it to his confidential friends, before proposing to the beauty of the season.

The scissors snapped and clicked; pins were set in with quick, skilful fingers, and Miss Vernon glanced downwards at the shimmering gown which clothed her in a mantle of loveliness.

The fitter rose from her knees.

"That is all, madam," she said, in soft, sweet accents.

"See that it is sent home to-morrow without fail," said Miss Vernon curtly, as the fitter assisted her to slip out of the wedding gown. "By the way, what is your name? I don't remember having seen you here before."

"My name is Angela Dennys, madam," said the girl, colouring a soft crimson, as she met the haughty woman of fashion's supercilious glance. "I have not been with Madame Noelle very long."

Miss Vernon nodded carelessly. The girl was pretty—too pretty for her station; it was just as well that she had not arranged to meet the Earl here, after all. He had such a ridiculous fancy for a face like that.

Ten minutes later Miss Vernon was driving down Bond Street behind her prancing thorough-breds, while Angela Dennys went to one of the workrooms to give directions about the lovely wedding-gown which was to grace the most fashionable bride of the season in a few days' time.

She had designed the dress with such loving pride and care as if it was to be her own. As the thought flashed upon her she blushed; and one of the girls sewing away industriously remarked that Miss Dennys was prettier than ever.

Ever since she had come to Madame Noelle she had proved herself of the greatest value. Her taste in designing was little short of genius, and madame was generous enough to acknowledge that Miss Dennys was a treasure to her trade.

She was certainly of a superior class to the usual run of workwomen in the establishment, but she was a reticent young woman and said very little to anyone about herself, and the little air of mystery which hung over her served to make her quite an interesting personality in the workrooms when she came in to give her directions.

Madame Noelle herself was interested in the girl, and the more so when the evening on which the wedding-gown was sent home, Miss Dennys came to her before leaving, and said:

"I wish to give you notice, madame—I am going to be married next month."

"Going to be married!" echoed madame, in real dismay. "But must you give up your work altogether, Miss Dennys? I should be glad to keep you on afterwards at an increased salary, you know."

"Thank you, madame—but I cannot," said Miss Dennys with a smile. "I shall have no further occasion to work in my future life."

"Oh! well, in that case, Miss Dennys, I must say no more," said madame with much graciousness, "and I wish you every happiness."

In the house in Grosvenor Square in which Vernon the millionaire lived, Miss Vernon sat and waited with unrestrained impatience for her *fiancé*. They were dining out together and this was to be almost her last dissipation as a maiden.

In three short days she would be transformed into the Countess of Endsley. Her triumph then would be quite complete, but—a shadow darkened her lovely face for an instant. Memory, which was not to be banished for ever, came back to her with terrible force. She thought she had forgotten that moment of madness a year ago, when she had thought the world well lost for—love. A factor which had not been taken into account in her present brilliant prospects.

Of course it would have been merely social suicide to marry the penniless heir-apparent to an earldom when the coronet

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of the same earldom was laid at her feet. Still—young Gilbert Thelusson had touched her heart as no one else had ever touched it.

She laughed at what she called his folly; he had imagined himself to be in love with her—which was exactly the case—and she had sent him about his business with a pang, but no sign of surrender. And, six months later, her schemes had succeeded beyond her wildest expectations—the broken-down Earl had proposed and was accepted.

He came in now, a fat, bloated-looking man with the signs of dissipation written largely over his heavy face. He might have been taken for anything but what he was—the descendant of one of the noblest and oldest families in the Peerage.

"Ready, Lena?" he said in a thick, hoarse voice. "We'll be late, I'm afraid, but I was delayed when I was just comin' out by a visit from young Gilbert. Used to be rather a pal of yours at one time, wasn't he, eh?"

He chuckled, and Miss Vernon shivered as she slipped into her fur-trimmed cloak, and led the way downstairs to the brougham which was waiting at the door.

"Of course I have met him often," she said coldly, as they were driven away through the lamp-lit square. "What a late call he seems to have paid you."

"Oh, it was business more than anything else. There's not too much love lost between us, you know, my dear—on his side, at least. He's a nice enough boy, but a trifle too strait-laced for these times. He dropped in to tell me he is going to be married. A new departure."

"*Married?*" echoed Miss Vernon faintly. The brougham was dark, and she was thankful for that mercy. Gilbert going to be married! Somehow, she had always considered him her special property although they saw little of each other.

The Earl laughed. "Seems to astonish you, Lena," he said; "yes, it's true enough. Next month, I believe, and to a stunningly pretty girl too. Face like a flower—he showed me her photograph. He's as gone as possible, you see."

"Who is she?" Miss Vernon hardly knew her own voice.

"Name? Angela Dennys—poor and pretty. That's all I could gather; but there were some Dennys used to live near my place—they went smash in those Australian bank failures and the girls had to go out and earn their living. Hard on the poor things, but they had grit, and they got on right well. This is one of them, so she's all right, from that point of view."

Angela Dennys! The girl with the face like a magnolia flower who had designed her wedding-gown! Miss Vernon drew a long breath—and this girl was to be Gilbert Thelusson's wife! The world is a mad and a merry place, my masters!

The evening was spoilt for Miss Vernon, though she was flattered and sought after to her heart's content. She saw always before her the sweet face of the girl whom she considered her rival—the girl who was to be Gilbert's wife.

Late into the night she sat and thought deeply; her maid had gone; and by degrees an idea came to her in the silence of the night. She would not see this thing done without making an effort to put a spoke in that wheel. And she sought her couch with a smile on her lips and evil in her jealous heart.

* * * * *

It was at an unusually early hour the following morning, that Miss Vernon's brougham drew up at the door of Madame Noelle's shop in Bond Street.

"Can I see—Miss Dennys?" inquired Miss Vernon curtly as the server came forward. "I wish to speak to her on a matter of urgent importance. Please tell her to come to me at once."

The softly-carpeted room with its many gilt mirrors was empty, and Miss Vernon turned round sharply as the door opened and Angela Dennys came in.

For a brief instant she examined the girl's face with angry, critical eyes, then she spoke.

"You are engaged to be married to Gilbert Thelusson?" she said shortly.

Angela coloured, and instinctively she raised her head a trifle proudly.

"I am," she said, "but may I ask, madam, what you require this morning?"

Miss Vernon made an impatient movement.

"I have come to see *you*," she said, "on private matters; nothing else. You are aware that I am to be married on Thursday to the Earl of Endsley, to whom Mr. Thelusson is heir?"

"I know, madam," said the girl quietly, "but I fail to see——"

"Wait a moment; what I wish to tell you is this. You think, of course, that Mr. Thelusson—loves *you*. Well—he does not because—he loves me and always loved me and because I refused him, and am to be married to his uncle, he vowed to marry the first girl who would take him. You see that he has lost very little time about it. And, of course, it will ruin his prospects for ever, for neither his uncle nor I will ever consent to receive a—*dressmaker* into the family."

Miss Dennys paled, but her eyes met those angry ones quite serenely.

"I think you must be mad, madam, to speak to me in such a manner," she said with dignity. "Both Lord Endsley and Mr. Thelusson know all my family connections well, and I have nothing to blush for. If it is true that—that——"

Her voice faltered. And Miss Vernon gathered her cloak round her with an air of triumph.

"Oh, ask Gilbert himself," she said airily. "He does not tell lies as a rule, and you will find that what I have told you is the case. Of course, you thought it would be a fine thing to be the wife of the heir to the title, but let me tell you that we shall never acknowledge you—or him!"

And without another word or glance, Miss Vernon swept out of the shop.

"Well, I've dropped the poison at any rate," she said to herself cruelly as the carriage bowled swiftly homewards, "she's one of those sentimental women who will weep and sob, and Gilbert I am sure hates a scene."

She glanced once more at the gorgeous wedding-gown which was lying in its box in her room—designed by the careful Angela.

Her wedding-gown! The sign manual of her coming triumph.

As she replaced the cover of the box, someone knocked at her door. A maid entered bearing a telegram on a silver tray.

Miss Vernon tore it open, and read the few words on the thin pink paper.

It was addressed to her father—but it was brought to her by mistake, she supposed.

"*Endsley died suddenly this morning. Heart disease. Break the news to Miss Vernon.*"

The little pink paper fluttered from her shaking fingers, and dropped on to the box in which lay the wedding-gown.

It was the death warrant of her triumph, and with a groan she fell to the ground.

* * * * *

Three months later Miss Vernon, in the hall of the Schweitzerhof Hotel at Lucerne, picked up an English paper, and read the following short paragraph:

At St. Peter's, Eaton Square, Gilbert, Earl of Endsley, to Angela, elder daughter of the late Colonel Dennys, of Warmingham Manor, Devon.

It was all over.

She had schemed and lied in vain. She had waited thinking that Gilbert would come to her—come to her for consolation which she was only too ready to give him, but—it was not so.

At the next drawing-room, Angela, the young Countess of Endsley, was presented on her marriage, in her wedding-gown of silver tissue, designed by herself and made by Madame Noelle of Bond Street.

And Miss Vernon consoled herself as best she could and married a wealthy, worn-out *roué*, and, though she sometimes came across Lady Endsley in Society, she never managed to get into that select circle of which Angela was the particular star.

E. Burrowes.

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GREAT NEW SERIES.

Confessions of a Self-made Girl

The writer of these Confessions relates in this series of articles the true story of her life, from the time when she left Cornwall, an unsophisticated but ambitious girl, until she made her name and fortune. Her name is well known to you.

For the purposes of these Confessions I am calling myself Maud Cardew, as my real name is too well known for me to wish to make the story of my life public in this manner.]

The Principals in the Story.

MAUD CARDEW.—The self-made girl.

HON. ROBERT LESTRANGE. (Commonly known as Bobbie.)

REGINALD (DI) NORTHCOTE.

Men who had helped her to come to London and befriended her on her arrival.

I Discover That I'm in Love.

The Duke's proposal was so abrupt I could hardly believe he had said it, and yet so like him that I need not have been surprised at all. For some minutes I made no reply, but sat down and buried my face among the cool petals of his bouquet of roses. Then suddenly I looked up.

"What if I don't love you?" I said.

"I will teach you," he answered.

"Do you think that you love me then," I asked, "in spite of your views?"

"I should not offer to share a coronet with you if I did not," he replied.

Something in his words struck me unpleasantly. It sounded like a question of buying and selling after all, and evidently he would consider that the best of the bargain was mine.

"What will the world say?" I asked.

He laughed carelessly. "What does it matter?" he said. "I shall certainly choose a wife according to my inclination, and the world will have to make the best of it. If beauty, brains and refinement are not enough, I don't know what is."

So it was that my goal lay in my grasp.

And yet I faltered.

At last I got up, feeling suddenly, without apparently any reason, on the point of a flood of tears.

"I'm very tired," I said, trying to hide the tremour in my voice. "I don't feel quite myself, somehow. I think I haven't recovered from last week yet. I—I—it is a funny thing to say, but I seem to have lost confidence in myself. I am afraid!"

He got up and came to me quickly.

"That's the nicest thing I have ever heard you say, Maud," he said, in a new tone. "If I have put my request baldly, remember it is only my way. You must know I mean more than the mere words. I know I am a sceptic, but I have a heart, and perhaps it is none the worse for not being too near the surface. But you should understand, for you must have discovered, as I have, the rottenness at the core of the usual, high-flown manner of speech."

I liked him at that moment as I had never liked him before, yet I could not escape an inborn conviction that he felt he was doing me a great favour, and would never cease to feel so. And I was too independent not to resent it even in a duke.

Finally he left me to think it over, and I spent a long, miserable morning of doubt and uncertainty. He had said he would call in a week, and that left me a respite of which I was very glad.

On Saturday, as I was looking very seedy, Di arranged to take me for a drive to Hampton Court the following day, and I was very glad to go. At first we only talked very little; but in the afternoon, when we were strolling through the grounds, he said suddenly:

"You are worrying about something."

I tried to smile naturally, but quickly grew grave again.

"Have you found out that you are not satisfied?" he said presently.

"I don't know," I answered, "I am in two minds about many things."

Then I asked him suddenly, with a cry in my heart that I did not understand at the time:

"Is there love in the world at all? Do you believe in love?"

He was silent for quite a long time.

"I cannot say 'No!'" he said finally, "because I once loved myself, and have no right to presume I am the only one. At the same time it is a thing I have never expected to find again, since I once believed, and was disillusioned."

"And what is the world like without it?" I asked—"without even the hope of it?"

"Oh, it is all very well," he answered, "when you have accustomed yourself to asking and expecting little."

I looked hard into his cold, clear-cut face, trying to see behind the mask.

"I wonder if you are honest?" I said. "I wonder if you mean what you say?"

"If I do not," he replied, "I shall certainly continue to cling to the illusion that I do."

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And that was all I could get from him to help me in my dilemma. I was disappointed without knowing why; but on Tuesday evening—the day before I was to give my answer—I discovered the reason.

To my surprise, when I went on the stage, I saw Di in the stalls with a lady, and, so far as I was able to judge, he was much engrossed with her. In all the time I had known him he had never, to my knowledge before, taken a lady anywhere, and certainly I had never seen him in the smallest degree engrossed with one.

To my chagrin the incident caused me a sense of disquiet altogether out of proportion, and I took myself to task very strongly over it. At a small supper-party afterwards one of the company suddenly remarked:

"By the way, did anyone see Mr. Northcote in the stalls with Lady Danestone? We shall be hearing some news soon, I expect."

"Who is Lady Danestone?" I asked casually.

"Oh, a very old friend of his, a widow, who has been abroad with her father for some time. Everyone has been expecting them to get engaged for some time."

"I thought it had always been said that Mr. Northcote would never marry?" I remarked.

"I daresay he never would have married anyone else, but since she has come back there is no knowing. Don't you think she has a lovely face? She was the belle of two or three seasons before she married Lord Danestone, but after he died she retired from Society, though it was always known Mr. Northcote saw a great deal of her."

I did not ask anything further, but I became conscious that my gaiety was growing more and more forced, and finally made the first signal of breaking up. I spent a few bad hours that night, driven this way and that by conflicting emotions. One moment I would throw everything to the winds and take my goal, the next I felt an unreasonable dislike for the Duke. But, most of all, I hated this Lady Danestone, and this only made me furious with myself, for what possible reason could I have for hating her?

Well, of course there was but one reason, and at last I was bound to confess it.

I loved Di Northcote.

How did it happen, or when it began, I could not tell, but there was no mistaking the fact. It was there, indisputable, fixed.

This, then, was the end of my triumphs—to fail in the greatest of all!

"What would it all be now?" I asked. "Would not everything crumble to mere vanity and vexation, since I had failed at the crucial point?"

"No!" I declared stoutly. "What I had set out to achieve, I would achieve—I would never allow myself to consider I had failed. I would marry the Duke and start afresh from my high pinnacle and mould my circumstances to my will."

Nevertheless, I cried myself to sleep, and the next morning wrote a little letter to the Duke, saying I could not marry him. In the afternoon he came for an explanation, and he showed far more feeling than I in the least expected. But to all his questions I could only shake my head, and answer:

"I cannot explain. I do not understand myself, but I think my experiences at Grindelwald altered me, somehow. I don't seem to care much about success and position now. I want something better. I feel somehow as if I were starving—starving for the nameless something, whatever it is, that gives one a grip upon life and makes everything worth while."

He watched me closely for a few seconds, and then got up to go.

"It's a funny old world!" he said. "We all seem born to strike across each other's lives and spoil them. If you had married me, I believe—mind you, I don't say I am sure—but I believe I should have taken life seriously and tried to do something. As it is I shall go on playing, and I shall play to the end of the chapter.

"It is much more sensible, really, because it saves a lot of bother. I shall go on with the game you interrupted at Grindelwald first, and when I am tired of it I shall go and hunt elephants again in Central Africa."

"And when you are weary of both?" I asked.

"Oh, then I must find something else. I daresay I shall not have half the difficulty that you will."

I smiled faintly.

"If I were to marry you," I said, "I should want to come after the elephants too, and never set eyes on England again," which was virtually to myself an acknowledgment of failure.

"You may come yet," he answered. "The trackless forests of the Dark Continent are an infinitely finer play-ground than the boards of a London theatre."

"But not so engrossing possibly," I answered. "My play is upon the heart-strings of humanity."

After he had gone I stood still for a long time staring vacantly at the fire, then I fell to my old trick of talking to myself in the glass.

"You will probably go yet, Maud," I said; "go and hunt with him in Central Africa."

June 15th.

It is sometime since the Duke vanished from London Society again as quickly as he had come, but I have heard of him at fashionable resorts abroad, and from all accounts he is having his play with a vengeance.

Meanwhile I have scored another big success, and am giving Di plenty to do as my banker. His engagement has not been announced yet, but Lady Danestone is still in London, and they are seen constantly together.

So the round goes on.

I play my part night after night, receive an ovation that is getting almost monotonous, and am *fêted* to any extent I like. Indeed there does not seem much I cannot have for the wishing, but withal there is a restless ache in my heart that will not be soothed, and I am not happy.

Di still comes to see me upon business matters, and when he is talking things over in that freezing way of his I feel as if I wanted to hate him, and I feign a coldness equal to his own.

And when he is gone I tell myself that he is a hard, cold man, unworthy of any woman's affection, and with only an indulgent tolerance for me, the actress, because it happens to amuse him.

Unless I am tired, and then I think of the cliffs at home, and the sea-gulls, and the wind-swept hills, till the tears blind my eyes. And it seems that after all Success is a poor thing without Love; because if you have everything in your life and have not Love, your heart may yet go hungering for evermore.

It is not too much to say I often feel I would give everything up to-morrow to nestle in the arms of a woman's world that was all my own. But how high a price we pay for this knowledge? How many women, rich in love to-day, would not envy me with all their hearts?

And I?

Well there are moments when I think wistfully enough of the cottage girl at home, tramping happily over the cliffs, with some stalwart lover, while the waves sing a low cadence to his stumbling protestations, drinking in the wonder of it, and the newness—that newness which is forever old.

June 20th.

Di came to see me yesterday afternoon unexpectedly. Some

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company in which he had invested for me had gone smash, and he was much perturbed about it. I leant back carelessly in a large armchair, and assured him it was of no consequence, and he could forget all about it at once.

"But it is rather a large sum," he said anxiously. "It means that you will be living up to your income for the present and that is never wise."

"It does not signify," I said. "I will retract next year."

He seemed to find a meaning behind my words, and looked at me keenly.

"Why not this?" he asked.

I laughed a little bitterly.

"Oh, I may as well make the most of my last," I said, not knowing what I meant myself, but yielding to some impulse. "I am thinking of taking a long rest."

He got up and walked about the room, as he always does when at all disturbed, and then fired a question at me from the window.

"Are you going to be married?" he asked.

I laughed with that same feeling of bitterness.

"Quite possibly," I answered. "Don't you think it is time I made a choice?"

"I hope you will make a wise one," was all he said.

"You speak like a book of sermons," I retorted. "What do you call a wise one?"

He did not answer, but continued his walk up and down the room.

"Evidently," he said at last, with seeming irrelevance, "you are not satisfied."

"No," I answered, "I confess I am not. I seem to have missed the something that makes it worth while."

"Have you found it out since we went to Hampton Court?"

I made no reply, but looked as callously indifferent as I could. "At least," I thought, "he shall not have the satisfaction of knowing the result of his indulgent tolerance." How I wronged him!

"By the way," I remarked suddenly, "that is a very beautiful woman I have seen you about with lately."

"Yes," he answered simply. "She is very beautiful."

"A widow, I am told," I went on, "who was once the belle of two or three seasons."

"Yes, I knew her at the time."

My goaded heart leapt ahead. Then he had loved her so far back as that? Loved her before she married her first husband, to win an unexpected reward for his faithfulness after all these years.

"I have an appointment with her and her father at the Academy this morning," he said. "I ought to be going." Then he added, "I am glad you are not upset about the money. I should feel I was much to blame had not those who advised me been very hard hit also."

"It is not of the smallest consequence," I reiterated cheerfully, and he went away looking very relieved.

But for me! When he had gone I sat down and buried my face in a sofa cushion, and wondered how I was to live out my life without him. The idea of him married to another woman, one who would probably treat me with the greatest condescension if we met at all—was unendurable. I felt as if I could do myself some injury.

Then Bobbie came.

He never waited to be announced, but always ran upstairs to the drawing-room to look for me, and so it happened that he came in suddenly, while I was still on the sofa with my face buried in the cushion.

"Christopher Columbus!" he exclaimed in genuine astonishment. Then crossing the room quickly, "Are you ill, Queenie?"

I looked up and tried to laugh.

"No, you silly boy! This is the latest phase of the 'rest' cure. It's to prevent wrinkles coming."

"Rest cure be blowed!" said Bobbie; "and what do you want to be thinking of wrinkles for? I dare bet my bottom dollar you're telling fibs."

I made room for him beside me, and he sat down, passing his arm along the back of the sofa.

"Tell you what, Queenie," he said. "You've got the blues."

"Yes, Bobbie," I admitted. "I've got the blues what you'd call 'thundering bad.'"

He laughed, but there was a little tender note in his voice.

"You've just jolly well got to tell me all about it," he said, drawing nearer, "and if there's a man at the bottom of it, I'll just go out now and break his head. Or if it's a woman I'll do the same."

"It is a woman," I told him.

"Then who is it?" he demanded. "By Jove! I'll make her hair curl!"

"Don't be hard on her, Bobbie," I pleaded. "Her name's Maud Cardew."

"Phew!" he whistled softly, then added, "Beastly nasty feeling to quarrel with yourself. Can't lash out hard and get it over."

"No, that's just it," I agreed, "and however sarcastic, or angry, or resolute you get, 'myself' only grows more miserable and takes no notice."

"I expect it's liver," he remarked so comically, that I couldn't help laughing.

"I'll tell you what," he added. "Marry me, and I'll guarantee you never have any more blues at all."

I smiled, and ran my fingers through his hair, feeling almost like his mother.

"What? Aren't you tired of it yet?" I asked. "I thought the May proposal was to be the last?"

"This is an extra one for luck," he asserted, dauntless as ever.

"It won't bring you the luck you imagine, Bobbie," I said; "but something better, the luck of my still remaining firm."

He got up without replying.

"Let's go out," he said. "I'll telephone for my dog-cart, and we'll go to Richmond."

We did, and his cheery nonsense had revived me wonderfully, when he suddenly launched upon a theme that undid everything in a moment.

"Won't it be the rummiest thing out," he exclaimed, "to see old Di spliced?"

I asked him what he meant, and he ran on—

"Oh, you know! Lady Danestone—old friend—cold broth—soon hotted—question popped—wedding bells!"

I could not help laughing at his original mode of explaining the situation, but at the same time I felt my newly-revived spirits sink to zero.

"Do you think there is anything in it?" I asked casually.

"Why not?" he replied, with unconsciously cruel candour. "There they are. She's beautiful and charming, he's highly eligible and unattached, and seems very hard hit. It looks to me as simple as one and one makes two."

I could not deny it, and it seemed as if the cold arms of the inevitable wrapped me closely round. I went in feeling as if every man's hand was against me.

August 25th.

Strange things have happened since I last wrote, and the Wheel of Fortune has turned for me this time, a most unexpected development. I am writing this in Scotland, whither I came with Colonel and Mrs. Mateson when they journeyed north for the grouse shooting.

I knew there would be a small house-party, but I do not

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think even my hostess knew at the time she invited me, that the Duke, who is some connection of theirs, was to be among them. He crossed over from Carlsbad quite unexpectedly, and came into dinner one evening, just as if he had come in casually from the shoot with the other men.

We were all very much astonished, though no one perhaps so much as I, and I was considerably less at ease than he, when, all unknowing, Mrs. Mateson assigned him to me for a dinner partner.

"This is a bit of luck," he said, and proceeded to converse in his usual cool, careless style, as if nothing had ever passed between us at all.

"What made you come here?" I asked presently. "I thought you were on the Continent?"

"I was until yesterday; how did you know?" and he looked into my face with so straight and deliberate a gaze that I felt myself flushing scarlet.

"Oh, I heard it somewhere," I replied carelessly.

"What made me come here?" he remarked presently. "Well, to tell you the honest truth I heard you were among the guests. I'm going off to the elephants shortly, and I thought I'd like to say 'Good-bye' once more. I also thought I'd like to see if by any chance you would change your mind and come with me?

"Somewhat ignominious to ask twice I know, but since you are one of the very few women I have met in my life who does not bore me to distraction in a few hours, I decided it was worth it," after which long speech he proceeded with his dinner much as if he had been discoursing on the weather.

"You still put it like a business transaction," I said, trying to take him lightly.

"You know why," he answered quietly. "I do not wish to insult you with inane flattery and sickening sentimentality, all of which in nine cases out of ten mean nothing at all."

He let the subject drop after that, but later on he inveigled me into taking a stroll with him to see Loch Katrine in the moonlight.

It was one of the most beautiful scenes I ever remember, and I have often felt since that a sort of intoxication of loveliness crept over my senses, lulling me into a state of forgetfulness of all but the present.

I had come to Scotland feeling somewhat world-weary, and asking myself often, "What is the good of it all? What does anything matter? Is it not far wiser, like the Duke, to seize all the fun, and care nothing about anything else?"

And to-night upon my restlessness the loveliness of the northern night had a strangely soothing effect, which yet, in the background, so to speak, greatly increased my dread of returning to the old life, with its perpetual ache.

And there was the Duke beside me—tall, subtle, graceful, beautiful as a woman, yet with the strength of a man, to wrap one round.

I remembered that his reputation was none of the best, that his past would not bear probing; but was there any man's except Di's that would? Even Bobbie had sown a plentiful crop of wild oats.

So I let myself drift, and more and more alluring grew the thought of those strong arms. I was so tired—so sick of it all.

Yes, I—Maud Cardew—the successful actress of the day, with all her life before her—had to confess that night to a nausea that seemed to embrace everything.

So the danger grew—so the hour tempted—so the dreaming night lulled my better self to sleep.

When at last the Duke stepped near I did not move, but let him fold me in his arms.

(Next Tuesday I will tell you of an accident that befell me.)

A Woman Now.

A Story Proving that Love is the Key to all Happiness.

"You won't marry me, Ida?"

"No, I think not. I'm quite sure not," added Ida Morny, after a second or two of hesitation. Guy Hardwick looked earnestly at her.

"But why not?"

"I don't love you," returned the sixteen-year-old damsel, with extreme frankness.

"Ida, you are cruel."

"No, I am not. At least I don't mean to be cruel. Oh, Guy! what made you fall in love with me? We were having such a nice time out there playing champion croquet games and getting up tableaux and charades and going on picnics. And now it's all spoilt."

"Ida," said Guy passionately, setting his teeth together, "you are a mere child. You haven't an idea what love means—apart from chocolate creams and new ball dresses," he added bitterly. "What made me fall in love with you? Because I couldn't help it. And now you refuse to give me back so much as a heart-throb in return."

"And I can't help that," retorted Ida, naively. "Don't look so cross, Guy. You frighten me."

"Because I am in earnest, Ida. Try to think of this as a woman should. Try for once to lift yourself out of the trivial world that surrounds you, and tell me from the very depths of your heart if you do not think you can love me."

Little Ida Morny began to cry.

"I don't want to love you," she sobbed. "I don't know why I should get married. I'm very happy as I am. Mamma says it is time enough for a girl to think of matrimony when she is twenty-five years old. And I am only sixteen."

"There," interrupted Guy, bitterly, "that will do. I looked for an ocean of deep, solemn sweetness in your heart, I find but a shallow pool, reflecting back the shadow of transient events—and that is all. Good-bye, Ida. Forget that I have made a fool of myself—if you can!"

And he strode away, biting his lips, and tearing at his long, black moustache as he went.

Ida looked after him with quivering dimples and tearful, velvet-blue eyes.

"I don't know what he means," said this little, half-blossomed bud of womanhood to herself. "I am sorry I have offended him, but I couldn't help it!"

And she went back to the hotel for her hour of guitar practising, feeling a little bewildered and a little regretful,

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just as she did when her pet greyhound ran away from her!

Just at the entrance to the laurel walk—a wild, sylvan spot that overlooked the blue gleam of the sea—Hortensia Carey met Mr. Hardwick. A tall, Juno-like woman of thirty, with soft, swimming, Oriental eyes and a face that was a dream of beauty in itself.

Hortensia Carey had come to Shackleton-on-Sea to get a rich husband. Hortensia liked Mr. Hardwick and she didn't like "that insignificant little mite of an Ida Morny," and Hortensia, snugly shielded behind the trees and bushes, had heard every word of the declaration of love and its refusal.

"Strike while the iron is hot!" said Hortensia to herself "There's many a heart caught in the rebound, and why not Guy Hardwick's?"

So she glided forward with upturned eyes shining softly beneath their long lashes.

"Mr. Hardwick, you are sad! You look troubled!" she murmured sympathetically.

"Troubled!" he echoed, moodily. "There's not much in the world but trouble."

"And you say that!" cried Hortensia. "You! Now I, who am only a woman, might utter it with reason!"

Guy looked into her Cleopatra-like face. Strange that he never before knew how beautiful it was.

"Will you take my arm down this steep hill?" said he. "And tell me what you mean by those last words?"

Hortensia knew how to avail herself of the golden tide of opportunity. Guy Hardwick was just in the mood when a man wants relief from himself. And the upshot of it was that he invited her to go out for a row after sunset.

"Don't ask me if there is anyone else you prefer," sighed Hortensia. "I am accustomed to place myself in a secondary position."

"There's no one I should prefer to you," said Guy slowly. "No one, at least now."

* * * * *

"Engaged!" cried Ida Morny, dropping her croquet mallet. "Guy Hardwick engaged! I don't believe it!"

"I saw the ring myself on Hortensia Carey's finger," said Mrs. Openwell. "She told me. She's proud of it, and well she may be, for Mr. Hardwick is by all odds the finest young fellow here this season. I don't quite like Hortensia, but she is very handsome. They will make a splendid couple. Quick, Ida; they are waiting for you to play—it is your turn!"

And Ida gave her ball a thump with the mallet, vitally damaging her partner's play, and not in the least knowing what she was about.

She went home and looked into her mirror.

"Yes," she said to herself, "I thought so! I'm only a little, insignificant creature, with pale cheeks, senseless blue eyes and hair like flax! Miss Hortensia Carey has eyes like black stars and the height of a queen. She's worth loving—but I didn't think Guy would have forgotten me so soon!"

And then Ida began to cry, she didn't quite know why.

"I think I'm tired of Shackleton-on-Sea," she said to herself. "I mean to write to Uncle Theodore to come and take me home. I suppose they'll be married at once, and Miss Carey won't return to Wortham at all. I won't go to the wedding!"

Of course the contemplated nuptials of wealthy Mr. Hardwick and the beauty of the season made plenty of gossip and considerable sensation. It found its way into the newspapers, no one knew how (except, perhaps, Miss Hortensia herself). Reporters jotted down the number of Miss Carey's dresses and jewels, the probable number of thousands per annum which constituted the bridegroom's income—and Hortensia's superb face actually appeared on the front page of the illustrated papers of the day as the bride of the season.

Guy was indignant enough—but Hortensia only laughed.

"Never mind, dear Guy," said she. "People will talk—and, after all, they don't mean any harm."

But one beautiful summer morning Miss Carey's seat at the breakfast table was vacant—and scarcely had the fact been observed when someone cried out:

"Why, General Vincent is gone, too!"

Undeniably it was awkward for the bridegroom-elect. Still more so when a note, sent from the nearest post-office, gave him to understand that the lovely Hortensia had given back her heart to the General, an ancient suitor of hers, who had recently fallen heir to a large fortune.

The note was prettily worded; it contained sentimental regrets to Mr. Hardwick that the future they had contemplated so sanguinely could never be realised and prayers for pardon in the name of love!

Guy set his teeth together, but he made no comment. He took his fate as it was dealt out to him! Nay, perhaps, in his inmost heart he felt some thrills of relief that he was for ever separated from Hortensia Carey. For he had some time since made the discovery that he did not love her as a man should love the woman whom he means to marry.

He sat thinking of these things, his head resting on his hands, his eyes fixed with infinite mournfulness on the blue sea.

"Oh, Guy! I am so sorry! So sorry!"

And Ida Morny burst out crying.

"Sorry, Ida? Nay, keep your kindly sympathy for those that need it more," he answered, somewhat bitterly. "Am I not better off, by far, than if she had married me? She did not love me, you see. Nobody loves me."

"Guy, that is not true!"

"It is pretty well proven!"

She came nearer to him, with burning cheeks and glittering eyes. "I love you, Guy."

"Love, little one? Love? You do not know the meaning of the word."

She drew back, trembling and sobbing.

"You give me my heart back then, Guy? You do not care for me?" she uttered.

"God knows, darling, that you are the only person in the world for whom I really ever cared."

"Then won't you let me comfort you now? Won't you let me take her place?"

And looking into Ida's eyes Guy read the truth.

"When I wooed you before, darling, you said 'no,'" he whispered and his gaze grew more intense.

"But I have grown into a woman since then, dearest."

So they were married. And, I suppose, I might add that they "lived happy ever afterwards." For Love is the key to all happiness—and Love folded his silver wings above their nuptial altar. As for Hortensia, she was rich—and that was all she cared for.

Queenie Robins.

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Complete in Twelve Lists.

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Cash Down. *Cash Down.* *Cash Down.*

1st Prize, £50. 2nd Prize, £25. 3rd Prize, £10.

And 25 Gramophones.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below will be found six paragraphs containing the buried names of Railway Stations in the United Kingdom (or words that sound the same as the names). You must write in the spaces given the names of the Railway Stations so indicated.

No word or part of a word may be used more than once in making up the name of a Railway Station. In the event of the name of a Railway Station occurring more than once in a sentence, it should be underlined and written down each time. In case of more than one person finding the same number of words for each or any sentence, those words containing the largest number of letters will have preference. No name of a Railway Station may be composed of a single letter, either standing by itself or taken from any word in the sentences.

When you have discovered the names of Railway Stations in the sentences, underline (in ink) the words which go to make up the names (or words that sound the same as the names) and then on the line underneath each sentence write (in ink) the correct names of the Railway Stations to be found in each.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to *Bradshaw's Guide*, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or Room Eight, SHORT STORIES, 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The names of the Railway Stations consist of one word or two or more consecutive words, or consecutive parts of one word, or two or more consecutive words.

The first prize of £50 will be given to the Competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of £25 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in the order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, cut out the list below and keep it by you. Don't on any account send it to us until the closing date is announced in SHORT STORIES. The eighth list of sentences will appear next week.

In the event of a tie a further list (or, if necessary, several further lists) of sentences will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

CUT THROUGH HERE

EXAMPLE.

The oaks were swaying in the breeze, the cows were grazing peacefully, when out of the park tore a huge black bull.

The Oaks, Sway, Cowes, Grays, Park, Black Bull.

SEVENTH LIST.

37. The March gales this year brought on great distress, blowing over houses and doing other damage

38. Before denying that Charlie Grafton was his accomplice, Harold Wood had strenuously maintained that they were in league.

39. He duns me for that money lent on March the twentieth, but I cannot risk a payment till Consols reach par.

40. Clara Haworth was a very idle child. She attended St. Mary's School, Hilford, for a year, but was then dismissed.

41. The Giant's Causeway is celebrated the world over. If by a goddess or god stone had been laid upon stone it could not be more wonderful.

42. "Is it true that George Robey hides in a pear-tree at the Tivoli?" "Yes, that is his latest eccentricity."

NAME ..... ADDRESS .....

.....

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Aunt Aster's Party.

A Story Introducing Picture Puzzles.

Not for worlds would I say anything against the Picture Puzzle Competitions which at present are flooding our magazines. I am too greatly indebted to the idea. I am merely going to tell a story which shows that in amateur and inexperienced hands it could lead to trouble. Sherpin's hands were amateur to rawness and very inexperienced indeed.

It befell this Spring that he and I were spending a few days in a hotel at Cliffgate, a south coast watering-place. He was there by invitation of a certain Miss Aster who was husband-hunting for her pretty niece, Margaret Staines.

They always wintered at this hotel. I had run down from town because the three of them were there, and because I wanted to keep an eye on Sherpin when I wasn't using it for the purpose of looking at Miss Staines.

Aunt Aster didn't care for me because, though I was not a poor man, I was only a fledgling of a barrister; while Sherpin had twice my income and a suspicion of a peerage somewhere tucked away in *his* family, for all the world like a tendency to consumption. The situation was a hackneyed one enough, but that didn't mend matters for me.

The Mitre wasn't the kind of hotel that I should otherwise have patronised. It was rather the family kind, where you fraternised in an evening, and played games in happy domesticity.

That is as a rule. But at this particular epoch its visitors sat apart in small, preoccupied heaps, with pencils, and pages of little pictures, while the silence was only broken by a request for advice or an occasional triumph-shout as solutions of puzzles suddenly dawned.

Aunt Aster complained bitterly.

"It's perfectly absurd!" she said.

She is tall and angular, with rather mud-coloured hair, and a particularly ample nose and ears.

"Last year we had round games or music or recitations every evening! I brought down my Halma-board last night in desperation, but Major Ricketts was sitting looking at a picture-book and wouldn't stir! Could I tell him what town a horrid drawing of a sheep's liver and a sheet of water represented? I said I could *not*—nor did I."

"Why, those towns are as easy as anything!" broke in Margaret Staines, tossing a bewitching little fair head. "What's bothering me is a bottle of champagne and a sort of hotel, and——"

"Aylesbury!" said Sherpin, staring absently at his cigarette—we were sitting on the hotel verandah—"I found it last night for Mrs. Butcher. It's a beer-bottle."

"Yes, but unfortunately it happens to be a composer's name, Mr. Sherpin. Besides, how *could* you make a house into——"

"They—haven't a single one left!"

It reached us—a panting, disappointed cry from a stout lady, who was hurrying along the garden path. Up the verandah steps she struggled, and dropped breathlessly into the chair which I vacated.

Aunt Aster surveyed her with sympathy.

"Have you asked Mrs. Nettleship?" she said. "She told me last night that she'd still three half-crown ones to sell."

"*Sell?*" gasped the newcomer. "*Sell?* It's not *tickets!* How can I spare time to go to theatricals when I've not found two of the railway stations? The competition closes on Tuesday! It's a copy of Bradshaw I wanted! The man simply laughed at me—said he was sold out in a couple of hours!

"That old cat of a Miss Entwistle won't let me so much as glance at hers because we're trying for the same one, you know! A pound a week for life! There's a man in a halo and a pot and some roots and things! Oh, there's Mr. Salmon! I wonder if he could——"

She was up and puffing down the steps before we had time to comment. Aunt Aster gazed at her retreating figure.

"Last year," she said severely, "that was as nice, sensible a woman as you could wish to see! We were here for a month together. It's all these abominable picture-books! I never saw a set of people more completely unhinged!

"So far as any evening entertainment goes one might as well stay in a convent! I wanted to take the small drawing-room for one of my usual evenings next week, but I don't suppose anybody would come unless I drew them pictures of what they were going to eat and offered them a few thousand pounds for solving them. What's the matter, Mr Sherpin?"

Sherpin—he is round-faced and small-eyed, and always earnest as any deacon—had sprung suddenly from his seat.

"A notion!" he cried excitedly. "Ripping idea! Why don't you give a picture puzzle party? Names of people you ask, you know—someone draw pictures to represent 'em, and each person have a bit of paper and put 'em down, and there'd be prizes for those who got most right!" His eyes gleamed like stars behind a pair of gold-rimmed *pince-nez*.

"Oh, what a perfectly *lovely* idea!" said Margaret, clapping her little white hands.

Aunt Aster hesitated.

"I haven't the least doubt of its 'taking,'" she said grimly, "but I have no wish to be even remotely connected with those nursery amusements."

"But, auntie, you *must* move with the times! You know cards or music would fall awfully flat just now." Margaret's blue eyes were shining too. "Only who'd do the drawing, Mr. Sherpin?"

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"Oh, er, I'd easily manage that if Miss Aster will allow me. Pin up some sheets of white paper, you know, and do it with black chalk, and give 'em two minutes to guess each picture. Take 'Entwistle,' for instance—just 'ENT' and a whistle—why there's hardly a name going you can't picturise in some way! It would be the event of the month!"

It occurred to me as I sat in moody isolation while they planned and suggested, and Miss Aster gradually thawed under Sherpin's enthusiasm, that he was probably right.

"I knew Sherpin and I had seen him draw in his college days, moreover, and I realised something of the enormity of his proposals. I ventured, in a moment or two, to raise the hesitating objection that with only twenty or thirty names from which to choose, his subject area would be somewhat limited. He said "Nonsense."

"Everybody hasn't an Oxford man's brains!" chimed in Margaret.

Aunt Aster added, with an inconsistency that took my breath away, that in getting up any sort of entertainment you invariably found that people seemed to raise difficulties for the sheer pleasure of doing so.

So I kept silence from good words or bad, and she sent out invitations that evening for the following Thursday. She was proud, I fancy, of the fact that her parties were considered "features," more or less, of life at the Mitre.

She informed me a day or two later that on finding that she hadn't a single refusal, she had given the entire arrangements into Sherpin's hands.

"He's so resourceful," she said. "And, between ourselves, Mr. Fenton, he's so keenly interested in anything connected with dear Margaret, that I have no fear of the evening not being a complete success!"

"In spite of the pictures?" I said unwisely.

She gave me one withering glance.

"I have always understood, Mr. Fenton, that the art of being a good hostess consisted in providing the kind of entertainment most appreciated, without considering one's own likes and dislikes. If you think that Mr. Sherpin's programme will in any way interfere with your enjoyment of the evening, I do beg that you will reconsider your acceptance!"

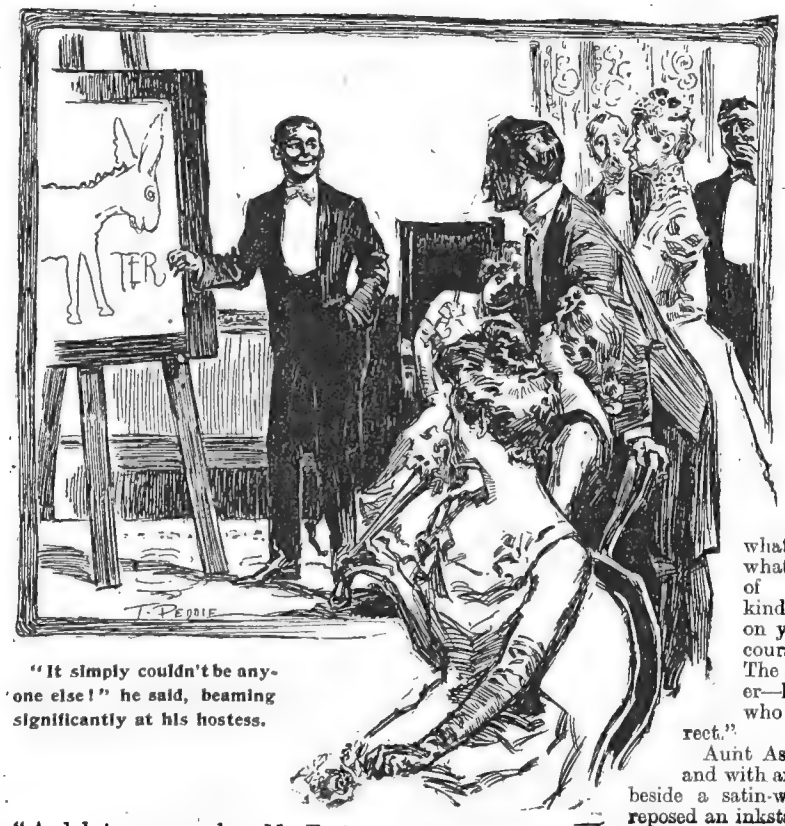
What could I do but grovel? I never saw Margaret in the daytime, since I was obliged to go up to town, and in the evening she and Sherpin were always studying *Public Property* or some other magazine, together because they were entering for the same competition.

At all events they couldn't sit hand-in-hand at an At Home, and perhaps I might get an opportunity on this occasion, at least, for a quiet word with her.

There seemed little prospect of it, however, when Thursday evening arrived, and I found my way into an already crowded drawing-room. Aunt Aster stood at its door smiling benignly as congratulations poured upon her from every fresh arrival.

"*Such* an original idea!" "*How* clever of you, dear Miss Aster!" "Delightful change from cards or music—not that your parties"—this from an old crock of a Major who lived at the hotel—"weren't *always* charming!" "Where is Miss Staines?"

She was moving among the guests, explaining, laughing, welcoming in a breath—the sort of charming, put-you-at-your ease woman that a man would like to see doing hostess in his own drawing-room. And at the far end of the room, with a black-board—a common or garden black-board—covered with sheets of white paper, stood Sherpin, chalk in hand, eager, perspiring, and issuing nervous directions.



"It simply couldn't be anyone else!" he said, beaming significantly at his hostess.

"Miss Staines has given you all cards with numbers, hasn't she, ladies and gentlemen? Now I'm going to draw—if you'll all kindly sit down—pictures on this board representing the names of people present.

"After each picture you'll be allowed two minutes to guess what I've drawn—I mean what name it represents, of course, and you'll kindly set down the name on your lists without, of course, saying it aloud. The winner will be the—er—lady or gentleman who has most names correct."

Aunt Aster sat down heavily and with an air of proprietorship beside a satin-wood table, on which reposed an inkstand and a cigarette-case, both in solid silver—her prizes to the successful competitors to be. She never did things by halves.

I surveyed my neat little card decorated with some thirty small spaces and corresponding numbers. (I treasure it yet.) Then I surveyed Sherpin. He "flaps" somewhat, with his particularly big feet and hands on most occasions, but at the moment he was literally hurling himself at the blackboard—which swung round and hit him at intervals—arms and legs working alike in the agonies of a portrayal of his artistic conceptions.

Presently he fell to one side. The sheet held a weird, globular object and a square block containing hieroglyphics of some kind. (Sherpin always did write a most villainous fist.)

"Pumpkin!" screamed a certain old Mrs. Appleton triumphantly from the front row of chairs. She was very deaf, by the way, and had absorbed the directions with difficulty. "It's a pumpkin—let me see—Cinderella—Cinderella—what's that coin in the corner?"

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"You mustn't speak—you mustn't speak!" cried a score of voices.

"Dear madam, it's a football!" corrected old Major Ricketts—"a very well drawn—eh? Oh, beg pardon! Not speak? No, of course not!" He made excited signs to the old lady, who was still saying "Pumpkin!" triumphantly and explosively.

They had been helping each other for the past week in a competition for a certain weekly, and I suppose habit was too strong for him. The room was staring at the board, for the most part, in agonised perplexity.

"Would you—might I ask, is the foliage intended to be *inside* the pot?" queried a timid voice.

"*Foliage?*" said Sherpin. "Oh—er—well, that's got a bit rubbed—" he scored his drawing violently—"that's a '20' and 'c-w-t'—but I mustn't help you, you know!" he added playfully.

"A seat, does he say? Well, I should never have recognised it—never! Meant for Dr. Seaton, I suppose," said Mrs. Appleton across three women to the Major.

I made an entry on my card, having already divined that the appellation in question was her own. Sherpin, a trifle redder in the face than usual, intimated that the first two minutes had expired and turned over his sheet. "But that hardly gives us time to *see* it, even!" objected one, Mrs. Nettleship excitedly.

"Oh, nonsense," said Sherpin cheerily. "Two minutes is quite long enough for any intelli—I mean for anyone but an—good Heavens, Mrs. Nettleship, what is it? You're not going? There's one coming now that even *you* will see in a—I—I mean—I say I'm sure I——"

Mrs. Nettleship had risen from her chair. She has the reputation of being a touchy woman, and gave Sherpin a glance that would have annihilated a braver man and swept—looking neither to right nor left—from the room.

Under the circumstances, and in the uncomfortable silence that followed, an attempt at a delineation of a few stiff leaves and a vessel that would promptly have sought the bottom of any sea, fell a trifle flat.

Aunt Aster was looking uncertainly towards the door, and Margaret was looking uncertainly at Sherpin. I edged a little nearer to the board.

"*Now* I shall puzzle you," he said, laughing nervously. He flapped round the board a third time, and when he stepped aside we saw a sketch of a man who knelt at a woman's feet and kissed her hand. At least that was what Sherpin meant it for, and all, I am convinced, that he intended to convey.

But there was only one man in the hotel who had a long and fiercely-pointed moustache—a man whose interest in a certain lady visitor was a matter of general comment—and Sherpin had somehow managed to bestow one upon the kneeling figure in his drawing.

"Why, it's Mr. Spooner! Look at his mustashys!"

It was the shrill, distinct voice of the seven-year-old daughter of a friend of Margaret's, allowed among the throng by special concession and declaiming now with pointing finger.

"Hush, dear, hush," said Sherpin, in politely annoyed tones. "You mustn't say when you find them out. Beastly little nuisance!" he added in lower tones to a neighbouring guest.

There was a moment's silence—the silence of sheer consternation.

"But, good Heavens, Sherpin, that's going a bit too far! Turn it over, man," muttered his neighbour hastily.

"Upon my word, sir." The individual of the pointed moustachios jumped up from his seat. The lady of his attentions was already crying quietly in the shelter of a curtain.

"Will you pass on to the next, Mr. Sherpin?" said Aunt Aster frigidly, with intense presence of mind. Sherpin was staring at the agitated room in blank astonishment.

"Pass on to the *next?*" he said. "But they've not had their two minutes! They've not—good Heavens"—as comprehension dawned suddenly, "you didn't think I meant it for a *picture* of Mr. Spooner? That is, of course, it's *meant* for him—I mean his name—but it's only a man—*any* man—spooning with a girl! It's not Miss Walters! I say, I hope nobody thinks I——"

"Get *on*, you chuckle-headed ass!" I said fiercely. I was at his elbow by this time. Perhaps my tones carried authority, for he turned his sheet mechanically over. I saw the folds of a distant curtain move convulsively, and realised that Margaret was trying to comfort an almost hysterical guest. Aunt Aster had begun to talk loudly about the weather.

"I'm going on," said Sherpin, with nervous rapidity, curling a big foot round one leg of the black-board as if he were trying to climb it. "You'll *all* guess the next, I'm afraid! In fact, there's only one person in the room it could possibly represent."

I caught my breath apprehensively as I heard the soft whirring movements of the chalk.

"Only one lady," Sherpin repeated himself as he worked. "I should say person—it could possibly—represent. *There* we are!"

"I don't know that I was surprised to behold a drawing—the best that he had yet effected—of a peculiarly large-eared donkey. There was a quick gasp from the room.

"Why, I thought you'd all fly to your cards!" exclaimed the exhibitor airily. "It's so palpable! You wouldn't be in this room at this moment if it wasn't for this donkey—I mean this lady—I mean, oh, I've forgotten something."

He rushed to the board again and added a minute "T. E. R." to his handiwork.

"It simply couldn't be anyone else!" he said, beaming significantly at his hostess.

There was another moment of breathless silence. I think everyone was too scared even to smile. Then I saw Aunt Aster rise in awful majesty. And at the same instant I realised that the switches controlling the electric light of the room were exactly behind me—and that the gods had delivered the situation into my hands. In a second I had the assembly in total darkness, and Sherpin by the collar.

"Get *out!*" I whispered fiercely. "Go and get into bed—*under* yourbed—anywhere—only disappear."

"But—but—but——"

I choked him at the third conjunction with a still stronger grip, and his voice broke in an odd gasp. I heard my own explaining to the company that something had unfortunately gone wrong with the electric light, but that if they would move on into the small coffee-room—where I knew that refreshments were spread—I had no doubt that matters could speedily be put right.

Someone opened the door, guests and hostess filed out obediently, and I shut it after them. When I turned on the light again Sherpin was not there. Nor was he to be seen when I, too, went to eat in the coffee-room.

I explained unblushingly to Aunt Aster that he had been taken suddenly ill, and I think she said that she was glad to hear it. We finished the evening with music and games—under my direction, since she and Margaret still seemed a trifle unhinged and grateful for supervision.

When Aunt Aster said good-night to me she pressed something into my hand. It was the silver cigarette-case.

* * * * *

It was actually Margaret herself who won the £500 that *Public Property* offered for the deciphering of its picture puzzles. She heard the news on the very day that I persuaded her to say yes to a question that I had been trying to ask for some time, and she went straight off and bought the motor-car in which, at the moment, we are enjoying a very golden month. I think Sherpin is abroad somewhere.

As I said at starting, I, of all people, have least cause to complain of the Picture Puzzle idea. I owe it a wife, and a particularly delightful honeymoon. I merely wanted to point out that in inexperienced hands it has its dangers.

Evelyn Glover.

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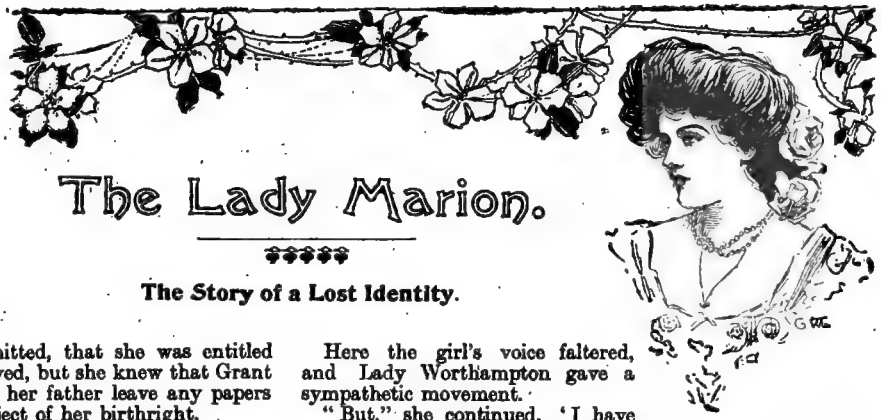

The Lady Marion.

The Story of a Lost Identity.

HAPPILY it is not often that titled women find themselves in such straits as did Lady Marion Grant on the death of her father. She was barely nineteen, and the Earl had left her penniless, having lost his whole fortune gambling at Monte Carlo.

He had quarrelled with every member of his family; he had changed his name, and, in his selfish anger, had refused to tell even his only child what his true name was.

That he was a Peer, he admitted, that she was entitled to the prefix of "Lady" he allowed, but she knew that Grant was not her real name, nor did her father leave any papers that enlightened her on the subject of her birthright.

There she was, a girl with a few kind friends, who knew her as Miss Grant, and were ready to give her a home till after she had recovered the first shock of her grief; but then she must go out into the world and fend for herself.

One thing at least her father had done for his motherless child, he had given her an excellent education. She could speak four languages, sing, play both the piano and violin, and was, besides, thoroughly well read.

Mrs. Harmon, the kind friend at whose house she was staying, strongly advised her to answer any likely advertisements for a finishing governess for girls, though, as she said to her husband, her very youth and beauty would go against her obtaining such a post.

Every morning the girl would anxiously scan the papers, but she found that when she applied in person for an engagement, her youth was always against her.

Well, something must be done, so she resolved to assume a middle-aged appearance, and persuaded her friend to lend her some money to buy a brown wig, in which streaks of grey hair were discernible. This, with the addition of a pair of spectacles, immediately put quite twenty years on to her age, and in this disguise she sallied forth one morning in answer to a letter requesting her to call and see Lady Worthampton in person.

Terribly nervous, lest her trick should be discovered, and at the same time feeling like a child playing a practical joke, Miss Grant rang the bell of one of the houses in Park Lane.

It was immediately opened by the footman, who informed the butler that it was another lady come to see her ladyship about the situation of governess. Marion was at once conducted to the boudoir, where Lady Worthampton was writing.

A tall, beautiful woman, still in the thirties, rose as she was announced, and stretched out her hand in kindly welcome.

At a glance, her eye took in the slender figure, and high-bred air of the grey-haired woman before her, quite a different type from those who had hitherto applied for her situation.

"Your letter sounded so promising, Miss Grant, that I thought I would ask you to come and see me; I am devoted to my three little girls, and very anxious about their welfare, so I thought it best to see everyone before I engaged their services."

"Yes, indeed, Lady Worthampton, I am sure it must be a great anxiety choosing a governess, for it is such a responsible post," Marion answered, in a clear, sweet voice, that certainly seemed very fresh and impetuous for the owner of grey hair.

Lady Worthampton gazed at her curiously, and the girl felt herself growing red.

"You have, I understand, had no previous experience of teaching?"

"No, I have always lived with my father, we travelled about a good deal, and it was not until his death that I found myself compelled to earn my own living."

Here the girl's voice faltered, and Lady Worthampton gave a sympathetic movement.

"But," she continued, 'I have always been devoted to children, and I think have generally succeeded in winning their affection. As regards the actual teaching, I do not fancy you will find me inefficient."

The mother smiled, she liked this woman, why, she could not say, but there was a strength and self-reliance about her, that contrasted favourably with the somewhat depressed specimens of humanity that had hitherto sought the post.

"I have three children, as I told you; I will send for them, so that you may judge whether you are likely to be friends. The eldest is just at an awkward age, fourteen, and requires rather tactful handling."

In response to her summons, the butler went for the children, who shortly after burst into the room, the youngest one hurling herself on to her mother, in a manner which showed the perfect confidence of their relationship.

"Maisie, dear, don't you see there is a visitor here," laughed her mother reprovingly. "Edith, dear," this to the eldest girl," go and shake hands with Miss Grant, and you, Mary. She is kind enough to wish to be your new governess."

In spite of the spectacles Marion's winning smile was irresistible, and the three girls were soon talking to her quite naturally, whilst she seemed to enter into their interests in a wonderful way, considering those grey hairs.

Lady Worthampton was delighted, and when she had dismissed the children, turned to Miss Grant with a smile, saying:

"You may think me foolish and impetuous, Miss Grant, but I am still young enough myself to believe in the intuitions of children. I know now that you will make mine quite happy, and be able to make them mind you, for they will do anything for people they like, and they do like you. About salary, shall we say sixty pounds a year, till we see how things get on?"

"Thank you, I shall be very pleased indeed to accept your situation, they are dear children, and you," she added, "you are so kind to me, compared with the other people I have seen."

"I hope, Miss Grant, that when I have had time to know you better, we may be real friends," responded Lady Worthampton, as she shook hands with her new governess, and bade her good-bye till that day week.

* * * * *

It is three months later, and the London season is in full swing. Worthampton House is packed with guests, amongst whom is its mistress' brother, Captain Lancelot Hardcastle.

The children are all devoted to Uncle Lance, and lure him up to the school-room on every possible opportunity. But good as he has always been to them, his visits to them this time are more frequent than ever, for there is a certain mystery surrounding Miss Grant that he has made up his mind to fathom.

She bears a curious likeness to a girl, almost a child, whom he once met abroad in one of the smartest French hotels, living there with her father, and yet he remembered quite well, that Mr. Grant had told him that he had no relations

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living of that name, on one occasion when he chanced to ask him if some Grants he knew were any connections.

The governess moved like a girl, talked like a girl, but yet had grey hair. That she was not what she seemed, he felt quite certain, and to-day he had confided his suspicions to his sister, who merely laughed at him, and told him not to interfere with Miss Grant's private affairs. She and the children were very fond of her, and that was the principal thing.

"I know, Molly, ask Miss Grant down to your fancy dress ball next week, and then let us see what we shall see," said Captain Hardcastle enigmatically.

"Certainly, I had intended to do so; I am quite sure that Miss Grant dances beautifully!"

That evening, after the children had gone to bed, Lady Worthampton went up to the school-room, and found the governess sitting by the open window, with her glasses off.

Instantly the door opened she sprang to her feet, and placed them on her nose, but not before the intruder had caught sight of a pair of exquisitely black-lashed blue eyes.

"I have come to ask a favour of you, Miss Grant, I want you to come down to my ball next Tuesday, and if you will let me, I should like you to hire a fancy dress for the occasion, and send the account in to me.

"And now comes the favour. I want you to choose whatever costume you like, but to let no one know what it is, not even the children, only myself. It is an odd request, I know, but there's method in my madness, and you know I am your friend," she added, laying her hand on Marion's arm.

The girl was too astounded to speak for some seconds. She had so longed to go to that ball, she was still not nineteen, and passionately fond of dancing.

"You are very, very good to me," she faltered at last, "and I should love to come down, but about the dress, I have some things by me that will do quite well."

"Then, that is settled; mind you do not tell anyone," said Lady Worthampton as she waved good-bye, and went downstairs to her guests.

Marion had all at once had an idea. Was it possible that by this means she might learn her own identity? She had three curious ornaments, which her father had warned her never to part with, heirlooms, he said they were, she would wear them on Tuesday.

As for a dress, she would wear her own beautiful golden hair in ringlets round her neck, whilst she would buy a large Duchess of Devonshire hat in purple velvet, with white ostrich feathers.

She had in her possession a dress of pure white satin, with a curious device in seed pearls, that had been her mother's, and which, with a little alteration, would fit her perfectly. As for the jewels, they were three brooches, composed of sapphires and diamonds, of remarkable beauty and design.

How she got through the day on the eventful Tuesday, she didn't know, even the children could not help seeing that she was excited about something, though they had no inkling that their mother had asked her to the ball, at which Royalty was to be present.

Captain Hardcastle told her that he knew she was coming, and wanted to know what dress she was going to wear, but his utmost intreaties only won the response, "a white one."

At nine o'clock that night, when she was dressing, a knock came at her door.

"Who's there?"

"It is only I, Miss Grant, may I come in?" said Lady Worthampton.

Marion felt herself in a dilemma, she could not refuse her kind employer entrance, but how would she take the deception of age she had practised on her?

However, there was no time to think, for again came the voice:

"Please let me in—I won't tell."

Marion opened the door, and hastily retreated into the shadow of her room, in case anyone passing should catch sight of her.

"Miss Grant!" exclaimed Lady Worthampton in astonishment, as she saw standing before her one of the most beautiful girls she had ever set eyes upon.

"Oh, forgive me, I had to make myself look old, no one would take a young governess, and I really didn't deceive you about my teaching," she said imploringly.

There was a pause, and then Lady Worthampton spoke, as only one woman in a million would have been generous enough to speak.

"Child, for you are little more than that, I forgive you, for it is many a long day since I saw anything so lovely," and the elder woman took the girl's pure, beautiful face between her hands, and kissed her, as if she had been her sister.

"No wonder Lance has lost his heart to the governess, though he has never seen you like this, has he?" she inquired, holding up one of the golden tresses in her hands.

"Not since I was fifteen," was the blushing response. "I remembered Captain Hardcastle quite well, for he dined with my father one evening when we were in Paris, and I was still a child in short frocks, but he does not remember me," she added.

"No, he has never spoken to me of this, though it was at his suggestion that I asked you to say nothing about your dress to-night. My dear child, what a lovely frock, where did you get it?"

"It belonged to my mother," said Marion, with a pleased smile.

"I don't think you have told me all about yourself, have you dear?" asked kind Lady Worthampton, as she saw the three wondrous brooches.

"I have told you nearly as much as I know myself, dear, kind friend; there is a mystery about me, my father was an Earl, and I am his only child, but he had quarrelled with his family, and changed his name to Grant, and died suddenly without revealing the secret of his real name to me."

"Then you are Lady——"

"Marion, and I know no more," returned the girl.

"My dear child, this is romantic enough for a novel. Well, come with me, if you are ready, and we will solve this mystery between us some other time. I am so glad, dear child, that you came to me, for I have an idea, but I will not raise your hopes, that your identity may be revealed this very night. Oh, I came to bring you this from Lance," and as she spoke, Lady Worthampton took up an exquisite shower bouquet of white roses, and lilies-of-the-valley.

Captain Hardcastle was drawn aside by his sister for a brief moment, when he entered the ballroom, where she stood awaiting her guests, and listened to her explanation of the beautiful girl who stood at the entrance of the conservatory.

"Molly, you're a brick! Montague is coming to-night, isn't he?"

"Do you mean—do you think?"

"I am almost sure that Lady Marion will prove to be the child of Montague's eldest uncle."

An hour later Captain Hardcastle led the belle of the ball into the conservatory to rest, after her last dance with him. Marion, for it is she, had never looked so lovely, a pink flush was on her cheeks, the light of love in her eyes, and a joyous elasticity in her step that had been lacking ever since her father's death.

Half the men in the room were in love with her, and it was with a thrill of sisterly pride that Lady Worthampton noticed her brother lead the girl to a secluded niche.

"Marion, my darling, I could not wait any longer, you know that all these weeks past, I have grown to love you. You know, do you not, dear, that it is Marion, and not Lady Marion that I want for my wife?"

"I know," answered the girl, raising her lovely eyes to his, so that he might see the answering love to his own. "I know," she continued softly, "that you loved me as the poor, middle-aged governess, and oh, Lance, I believe I have loved you ever since that night more than three years ago, when you

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gave me some chocolates, because my father would not let me go with him to the opera."

"My love, my little Marion," answered the enraptured soldier, as he folded her lovely form in his arms, and kissed one of the golden curls that lay near his lips.

"But Marion, do you really not know what your father's title was, have you no clue?"

"None," she answered, "only these three brooches I now wear are heirlooms."

Scarcely were the words uttered, than two men entered the conservatory, talking in low and agitated tones. On seeing that one of them was the Earl Montague, for whom he entertained a strong dislike, Lancelot drew his betrothed into an alcove shaded by a huge palm-tree, and laid his finger on his lips to enforce silence.

"I tell you, Caston, it must be the girl, how else could she have those brooches. You know they have always gone to the eldest daughter of the head of the house, to come back to the family at her marriage, or the coming of age of the daughter of the next in sucession.

"These brooches have been searched for everywhere. I know that my uncle had them in his possession when he left England but so cleverly did he disguise his identity that we have never been able to find out what name he assumed. He may indeed be living now, for all we can prove to the contrary."

"And what is it your intention to do?" asked the man addressed as Caston.

"Do? Why, nothing; do you think that after all these years I intend to try and find a claimant for either the title or the money? I am not quite such a fool, my dear fellow!"

"Blackguard!" muttered Lancelot to himself, "you will have to sing another tune presently."

Marion meantime had listened breathlessly, and when the two men had walked off, turned to her lover, saying:

"Did they mean me?"

"Yes, dear, undoubtedly they meant you, those jewels are recognised."

"Then I am——"

"Lady Marion Montague. My darling, do you know what the world will say of me?" he inquired anxiously, as he drew her arm within his own.

"Of you, no, what should it say?"

"That I gained your consent to become my wife, before you knew who you were, and what a high position you held in the social world. Darling, when your claim is made, you will be a very rich woman, whilst I am a comparatively poor man, will you also think that of me?"

"Lance, do you doubt my love? I was so, so happy, and you go and spoil all by thinking me capable of such mean things," and, greatly to Captain Hardcastle's dismay, Marion, who was overwrought and excited, began to sob quietly.

"Hush, my darling, my sweetheart, I cannot bear your tears, I know you love me, I know you trust me, thank God for it. Sweet, you mustn't cry, you must be very, very happy again; look up, dear, and let me kiss away those tears," said her lover, as, lifting up her face to his own, he bent and kissed the long black lashes and sweet, pure lips, until they were once more smiling back at him.

But time had passed quickly and the lovers had, in common courtesy to their hostess, once more to make their appearance in the ball-room.

* * * * *

But little more remains to be told. Backed by Lord Worthampton's money, the lawyers soon succeeded in proving Lady Marion's identity, and Lord Montague has to disgorge a good jointure out of his immense income.

Directly the case was settled, Lady Marion Montague became the wife of Captain Lancelot Hardcastle, and was presented at Court on her marriage by her sister-in-law, Lady Worthampton, who lived to bless the day when she took a fancy to the grey-haired, young-voiced governess.

As for the children, they were inconsolable at the thought of losing her, and their aunt's visits were always looked forward to as red-letter days in the schoolroom.

M. Hoey.

Your Editor Chats.

FIVE more lists of sentences will appear in connection wiih the competition, making a total of twelve to complete the set. You will find the seventh list on page 591.

When readers raise points on which they are in doubt, they must not expect to have them answered by post, as some of them do. This of course would give them an unfair advantage over other competitors. If a point of sufficent general interest is raised it will be answered in this column of the paper each week.

Below will be found some further points raised by readers, together with my comments thereon:—

Question: Before you made the rule regarding the making of names of stations out of a single letter, either standing by itself or taken from a word, I had filled in several such. May I cross them out or must I obtain fresh lists?

Answer: Provided you cross them out so that the other names are not rendered illegible, it will not be necessary for you to get fresh lists.

Question: May the name of a station be formed from letters in the middle of a word, or must they be taken from either the beginning or end?

Answer: Provided the letters are consecutive, it does not matter from which part of a word they are taken.

Question: If the name of a station occurs in more than one of the sentences of a list, may it be put down each time?

Answer: It is clearly stated in the conditions that the names of stations should be put down each time they occur.

IN a few weeks' time a series by Winifred Graham, the talented authoress of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," which appeared in SHORT STORIES, and other tales, will commence. This series will be something quite different from anything we have had in SHORT STORIES.

THERE will also start shortly a new serial by Blanche Eardley, who is at present contributing her experiences as an actress to *Pearson's Weekly* under the title of "Tinsel Triumphs." This lady's writing is quite new to readers of SHORT STORIES, but I am sure you will all be very charmed by it. Watch this column next week for fuller particulars of our two new attractions.

I WONDER how many of my readers have sent their contributions to the FRESH AIR FUND yet. The earlier you send them the better, as the number of children to have a day in the country depends upon the money received. It naturally takes time to arrange for the parties, so if contributions do not come in very freely at the end of Spring and beginning of Summer it means that there must be many little faces wearing—instead of a bright, happy look—a look of intense disappointment that the summer has gone and they haven't had a FRESH AIR FUND excursion, just because the money came too late to be able to be used this year, or because it didn't arrive at all.

If you can't send so much as you would like to *now*, send what you *can* afford *at once*, and the remainder as you are able. Contributions should be sent to the Hon. Secretary, FRESH AIR FUND, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., who will forward collecting sheets on application. All amounts will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*.

Your Editor.

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NEW SERIAL.

Held Apart

The Story of a Strange Double Fraud and its Influence upon some Young Hearts, a Great Name, and a Famous Fortune.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "The Golden Dwarf," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

SOME INTERESTING PEOPLE.

John Davenal. A diver.
Hannah Davenal. His sister, maid to Lady Tarleton.
Moira. Supposed to be the diver's daughter.
Sir Guy Vanbrugh. Moira's lover.
Adeline, Lady Tarleton. His aunt.
Irene Tarleton. Her daughter.
Edward Stormont. Lady Tarleton's brother-in-law.
Paul Jerome. His friend, a war-correspondent and journalist, in love with Irene.
Dennis Hartigan. A ship's steward, and husband of Hannah.
"Kit" Hartigan. His sister, a blind girl.
Detective-Sergt. Ussher. Of Scotland Yard.

TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

Ussher Interviews the Gamekeeper.

A THRILL of terror shook Lady Tarleton as she sank down upon the leaf-strewn soil of the plantation, crouching, like a hunted thing, into the wild undergrowth of the coppice near her. All the artificial courage that her unscrupulous nature had drawn from the atmosphere of wealth and comfort in which she lived, and had her selfish being, seemed suddenly to have deserted her. She was no longer "my lady," but that trembling and pitiable wretch, a guilty creature in hiding.

Shivering in her spasm of abject cowardice, she lay concealed, scarcely daring to breathe. The sound of crackling twigs and rustling leaves that marked the progress of the two men continued for another moment, then she heard the gamekeeper's voice again, and listened intently. He had moved with the detective to a more distant point, and his tones, though audible, were less distinct.

"Here was where I stood, Mr. Ussher, sir," he said, "just by this broken poplar. I was on my way to look round the rabbit-warren on the far side of the park. We've no end of trouble with those poaching iron-workers, they've dogs as dumb as fishes, and as clever as any Christian."

Lady Tarleton raised herself on her hands and knees and peered out among the thinner growths of the leafy screen that sheltered her. Some few yards away the gamekeeper and Mr. Ussher had paused—they were gazing across the open glade that framed the low, dark pile of the mausoleum.

"And as I was about stepping out on to this bit of lawn," pursued the gamekeeper, "I saw by the light of the moon two figures coming towards me, and going, as it were, in the direction of the Tower, too, for they were bearing over to my left a bit. Both were women, and they were walking quick, and had their heads down. One was taller than the other, and walked in a stiff, old-maidish way, the second was stouter and rolled in her gait."

"Now what," demanded the detective, speaking for the first time, "what do you mean by that? Do you suggest that she was drunk?"

"Oh, dear no," was the answer, "I should say short of breath. When they got near me I could hear her pant. And they were hurrying enough to make anyone short-winded that was given to stoutness. That was what made me think of her ladyship, who is stout and a trifle uneven in her walk."

"Quite so," responded Mr. Ussher, "but you told me you saw this person's face. Now what I want you to do, is to go out there into the open to about where they were when you say you saw her face. I will remain here and ascertain if my own sight will carry to the point in question."

"Very well, sir!" assented the gamekeeper, and he strode out into the glade.

Lady Tarleton bit her lip, she was beginning to shiver again. There was something unnerving about the spectacle of the two men so deliberately experimenting with a clue which, she knew, might lead, all too disconcertingly, to herself, and betray, in a flash, the buried secret of years.

Out into the moonlight stalked the gamekeeper. Halting between the rim of the plantation and the mausoleum, he faced the detective and took off his hat. Further removed from him than Mr. Ussher, Lady Tarleton could plainly

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perceive, in the brilliant, steel-blue radiance of the spring moon, his simple, good-natured visage.

Mr. Ussher nodded gravely by way of a silent commentary on the experiment, and followed his companion into the glade. The unsuspected watcher sprang up and darted to the verge of the protecting shadow cast by the plantation. If it were at all possible, she must hear what else the detective had to say.

"Humph!" he exclaimed, thoughtfully, "so far the thing is feasible. But you told me that this—this female was closely muffled. How, then, could you see her features?"

"That was not difficult," rejoined the other, "it was cold, and she evidently wanted to wrap herself up a little more. One end of her wrap was thrown about her neck and face. She drew it off, and flung it round her again. The second woman, the woman of your photograph, who wasn't wrapped up much, helped her with it, and for an instant I could see both of their faces. The smaller woman was quite plump in feature, with a short nose and a pouty sort of mouth."

"Could you," queried the detective, "could you tell what colour her hair was?"

"No," said her companion, "she had a little shawl on over her head, and then the wrap she wore about her was thrown, as I tell you, round her shoulders, and brought, like a veil, across her face. Even when she took the wrap off I couldn't see her hair or her dress. But what struck me was that she was a dumpy, middle-aged, sourish kind of body, between you and me, Mr. Ussher, the spit of my lady."

"Humph!" coughed Mr. Ussher. "Well, I'm obliged to you, I'm sure. It may lead us somewhere, and it may not. But as her ladyship may not be too pleased at this particular female resembling her, you needn't be too free in mentioning the likeness. It's quite sufficient for me to know about it, and I don't want you to come to any loss through me."

"I'm obliged to you for the hint," answered the gamekeeper, a certain anxiety creeping into his tone, "is there anything else I can show you while we're here?"

Mr. Ussher reflected. "No, I think not," he decided, "but tell me, why didn't you follow the women?"

It was the gamekeeper's turn to cough. "Well," he responded, "fancying I had seen her ladyship in person, I concluded the best thing I could do was to mind my own business and get on to the rabbit-warren."

"Discreet, I own," admitted the detective, "but, from my point of view, regrettably so. However, it can't be helped. Which way did they go?"

The gamekeeper indicated the route, it led towards Groudle Tower. Mr. Ussher noted it critically.

"Well," he observed, "shall we get back?" And he suited the action to the word by commencing to retrace his steps to the plantation. He was bending his course to the very spot whence Lady Tarleton was straining her eyes and ears.

"This is a shorter road, sir," called his companion. Mr. Ussher diverged accordingly, and Lady Tarleton breathed again.

Not until the two men had vanished in the night did she dare to steal out, and make, with the utmost caution, by devious, leafy ways, for the Tower.

TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

"Quite Possibly Coincidence."

"INDEED, sir, and it's very natural to be interested in murders and such-like, and you a newspaper gentleman and all, they do say. I know I always take care to see the papers myself if there's been a big murder, or some great criminal is being tried for his life."

Paul Jerome smiled. "You are exceptionally candid, Mrs. Lintot," he observed, "but I fancy most people are of

(*Continued overleaf.*)

EXTRACTS FROM TWO OF MANY MEDICAL REPORTS

"This addition to the list of patent foods is a very palatable and appetising article. By a series of digestive processes *in vacuo*, it is reduced to a form which furnishes a most readily digestible food, remarkable for its pleasant flavour. Experimental usage has proved this Food to be potently alimentive."—*Quarterly Medical Journal.*

"I have analytically examined Moseleys Food, and find that the relative proportions of carbo-hydrates, hydro-carbon, and proteid constituents are most excellently blended, so as to secure its being well digested by the delicate stomachs of children and invalids."—*Dr.* ———, *F.R.C.S., Bradford.*

UNSOLICITED TESTIMONIALS.

(HUNDREDS RECEIVED).

"My child, six months old, has derived great benefit from Moseleys Food. The poor little thing could not retain nourishment, and was daily becoming worse, in fact it was nothing but skin and bone. Moseleys Food was recommended, which I tried and have since used. I feel sure it has saved the little one's life."—*Mrs. Ellen Goodwin, 29 Foundry Lane, Hyde.* Jan. 9, 1903.

"I have found nothing to beat Moseleys Food. I have four children three brought up on the breast, one on your Food, and the last one has thriven better than the other three."—*H. Townsend, 32 Millow Street, Accrington, Lancashire.*

"Our last baby has been brought up on your Food *from its birth* and is now five months old, and the bonniest child we have had."—*Edward Dufty, 4 Bradbury Street, Sheffield.*

MOSELEYS FOOD Ltd., Sample Dept., Stockport.

SERIAL STORY.

your opinion at heart. And so it was here that the poor creature was found dead?"

The housekeeper pushed still wider the door of a small room on the topmost storey of the Tower, and, passing in, drew up to the roller the partially-lowered blind.

The apartment thus flooded with light looked into the central courtyard of the Tower, and was one of a row of servants' bedrooms, each scarcely larger in area than a billiard-table. Its furniture comprised a bed, a toilet-table, a wash-stand, and a single, cane-seated chair. The boards showing between the strips of carpet that diversified the floor of the room were dark with age.

Painfully neat as was the tiny chamber, it had an air of grim and desolate loneliness. Mrs. Lintot, with her rosy, withered cheeks, and sweeping gown, seemed out of place in it.

"Yes, sir," she said, "it is. Not a very homely corner to die in, I'm afraid, but my lady is very seldom here, and Davenal never had a proper room of her own. Not that she would have made it any more comfortable, sir, as some of us do, with nick-nacks, and bits of her own things. There was no sentiment about Hannah Davenal, or Mrs. Hartigan, as I suppose we ought to have called her."

The war-correspondent was examining the lock of the door. "There is no key to this?" he queried.

Mrs. Lintot shook her head.

"It's against the rules of the house for servants to lock their doors," she explained. "I have all the keys of this storey. As it happens, this room was shut up for a little while after the murder, but I soon had it open again, the sight of that locked door made **me** nervous, and servants are superstitious enough, always. I'm going to have the place turned into a box-room, no one will ever want to sleep here."

"A very tactful proceeding," said Paul Jerome, absently, and he crossed to the window. It faced the tall and ruined mass of the tower that had given its name to the antique residence, and it was practically inaccessible from without.

The point had not been without interest for him, and he nodded thoughtfully, as if registering a mental memorandum. Then, with a final glance round the little chamber in which so dark and mysterious a tragedy had been consummated, he passed out on to the landing.

Bare, irregular, low-ceiled, and lit by a couple of thick panes set between the huge rafters, it was a curious part of the Tower. The war-correspondent surveyed it—nook by nook.

"Is that the only means of access to these regions?" he inquired, indicating the winding staircase that left the landing at a distant angle, and plunged into the lower portion of the house.

"There is no other way up, sir," responded the housekeeper, closing behind her the door of the apartment from which they had emerged.

Paul Jerome traversed the landing. "Where does this lead?" he asked, peering down a narrow, doorless, dusky archway.

Mrs. Lintot came to his side.

"That is a blind passage, sir," she answered, "in either wall are cupboards—huge and rambling places. We never use them, though they are big enough to sleep in, excepting for the shelves and that they have no windows."

The war-correspondent took a stride into the passage, pulled open one of the ranged doors, and glanced in. As he bent forward to penetrate the gloom, he lost his balance and staggered into the darkness—there was a step before him which he had failed to notice.

"Dear, dear!" cried Mrs. Lintot, hastening to the threshold of the cupboard, "have you hurt yourself, sir?"

Paul Jerome reassured her. He had steadied himself against what he felt to be a tier of shelves, and proceeded to get back into the narrow corridor.

In its less equivocal light his hands attracted his attention they were thickly soiled with fine black dust. He took out his handkerchief and wiped it off. Abruptly he checked the action, contemplating the smeared finger-prints he had made on the white linen.

His lips pursed reflectively as he glanced back towards the cupboard. Again he checked himself, and pushing to the door of the shadowy recess, turned away with a jest at the expense of his grimy fingers.

Mrs. Lintot was apologising for the presence of the dust. "But, indeed, sir," she added, "no one ever troubles about those cupboards, they are unused from year's end to year's end. There must needs be such places in a big old house like this, sir."

"Of course, of course," assented the war-correspondent; "however, I shall be glad to 'wash the filthy witness from my hands,' as Lady Macbeth has it. So I will make for my room. Many thanks for piloting me round."

He slipped a couple of half crowns into the housekeeper's palm, cut short her acknowledgments, and dived downstairs out of the regions he had obtained her assistance in exploring.

Once in his own apartment he did not seem particularly anxious to cleanse his soiled hands. Instead he got out a beautifully laundered handkerchief, and began deliberately to impress his thumb and finger prints upon its snowy surface. Ultimately he had recourse to a magnifying glass and inspected the prints. His expression, as he busied himself in these proceedings, was absorbed to a degree.

At last he did wash his hands in a bowl of cold water, and plucking his bed-room candle from its holder, pocketed it. A hasty reconnaisance, and he stole out of the room, retraced his steps to the upper storey, and darted into the corridor between the rows of unused cupboards. A moment, and he was ensconced in the very cupboard into whose depths he had so unwarily staggered.

The spurt of a match lit the place with the glow of a vesta, he pulled the door to after him, lighted his candle, and examined his surroundings. He was in a species of store closet, reached by a step from the passage without. In it there was space sufficient to permit of his standing upright before a series of deep shelves.

The shelves were an eighth of an inch thick with dust and showed plainly where his clutch at one of them had brushed the wood clear. On a lower shelf, conspicuous in the direct illumination of the candle, were other and similar marks. But these did not show the wood beneath, nor were they clear and sharp. Fresh dust had settled on them, blurring and partially filling the indentations.

Paul Jerome's face fastened upon them and his eyes sparkled. Then he shook his head with a sudden dubiousness.

"Quite possibly coincidence," he muttered; "the murderer may have hidden here, and he may have tripped down that step as I did. He may have clutched at the shelf as I did, and as I did, left his sign-manual in the dust. But so—bar the hiding—might any one of a dozen innocent persons; a new and curious housemaid, for instance."

He shook his head, put his foot on the step, and made as if to blow out the candle.

"And yet," he said, "those marks on my handkerchief, grey, uneven, powdery, unmistakably suggested the prints on the pillow that was used to smother the chloroformed Davenal."

His soliloquy was interrupted. The door had a lock, and the lock a projecting, box-like case. About the lock, on the light green paint, exceptionally well preserved, of the door frame, were the prints of ranged finger tips.

The war-correspondent examined them. Then he opened the door and inspected the frame without—it was clean and unsoiled. He returned to his examination of the interior. The finger-marks had evidently been left by the hands of someone grasping the edges of the lock-case, as if to hold it to.

Some pressure had been used, and the formation of the skin-ridges peculiar to the tips of the human thumb and fingers was perfectly reproduced. Paul Jerome studied them for five minutes. At the expiration of that time he blew out his light and went back to his room.

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Short as had been his occupation of this apartment, he had already transformed it into a species of "den." A small portmanteau full of manuscript and miscellaneous papers lay open on the bed, a metal ashbowl and a cigar-case stood on the toilet table, hard by a collapsible tube of paste.

Near the table was a folding deck chair, with the war-correspondent's initials painted on it, and a big blotting book thrown down in the seat of it. In an adjoining corner lay a pile of London "dailies."

Paul Jerome displaced the blotting book, pulled the deck chair to the corner, and commenced to burrow in the heap of newspapers. After hastily scanning several copies of a particular journal, he picked up, with an exclamation of satisfaction, a loose sheet of the same paper, a London "halfpenny morning" famous for its enterprising interest in criminology.

The sheet he had fished up was an illustrated one, and among its contents bore a couple of photographic reproductions. Each represented a set of finger-prints, and beneath them was a bold inscription—

THE GROUDLE TOWER MURDER.

How the Mysterious Husband's Innocence was Established.

HARTIGAN'S FINGER-PRINTS AND THOSE FROM THE PILLOW.

The war-correspondent sought out a penknife, cut away the illustration, and stuck it on to a piece of blank paper. Then he marched off with his candle and the piece of paper to the topmost storey.

Entering the windowless cupboard that he had submitted to so curious an examination, he set down the candle on the ledge, and applied to the finger-prints on the door-frame a portion of the paper he had brought with him. He took the precaution to damp it, and laying it cautiously against the soiled paint, he rubbed it lightly with the smooth end of a vulcanite fountain-pen.

Completing this extempore transfer process, he removed the paper. It bore a clear copy of the prints on the frame. He compared them with the newspaper copy of those found on the pillow. They were to all appearances identical.

Paul Jerome's face was grave as he extinguished the candle and carried off the sheet of paper upon which he had set up a parallel so deadly and yet so futile. For the discovery he had made could not be said to throw any definite light upon the problem that the war-correspondent, piqued into action by certain puzzling circumstances, had finally determined to solve.

TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.

"Guy is Sweet on Her."

"CAN you spare me a moment, Edward?"

Edward Stormont arrested the progress of his steadily-travelling pen and looked up at the speaker. Lady Tarleton had come noiselessly into the library where he sat at work.

"Certainly, Adeline," he said; "I am quite at your service." He laid his penholder on the rack of the silver inkstand before him and waited.

Lady Tarleton sat down.

"I wanted to ask," she went on, "if you are likely to be staying at the Tower much longer before going south."

The explorer twisted his moustache, he was endeavouring to concentrate his mind upon the question thus abruptly presented for consideration.

"I can hardly say," he decided; "you see, I began to make notes for my new travel book, and note-making drifted into writing. And though, as you know, I am far from partial to the Tower as a place of residence, yet I have all my specimens and diaries here and unpacked, and the writing fit seems to have come on me. So, on the whole, I fancy I shall not leave Groudle for a month or more."

He glanced inquiringly at his sister-in-law's face; it bore a far from pleased expression.

"But don't let me interfere with your movements," he pursued. "That business about your unfortunate maid will

(*Continued overleaf.*)

A Woman's Life Prolonged.

Bile Beans Cure Headache, Nausea, and Debility.

Disorders of the digestive system and liver are so common and give rise to so many painful symptoms that the following facts, told by Mrs. J. Philip, of Warren Street, Fitzroy Square, London, N.W., cannot but prove useful to many readers. Said Mrs. Philp:—"Some months ago I began to experience severe pain in my head, accompanied by sensations of ringing and buzzing. Afterwards I became dizzy at short intervals, and I had all sorts of curious sensations, difficult to describe, while at times my sight became so blurred I could scarcely see. After a while to this torture was added an inability to keep food down. If I took a cup of tea in the mornings this would start sickness and vomiting, which made my head almost burst with pain. Then my appetite declined, and I became very weak and hopeless, and felt altogether knocked up.

I consulted three doctors in succession. One told me my condition was the outcome of worry and being indoors too much. Another said I had had my system impaired by cold and so on. All gave me various medicines, but none succeeded in making me the least bit better. I had been suffering between three and four months in the way described, and was still getting worse, when the wife of a friend of ours happened to call and express great enthusiasm about Bile Beans, which she said had worked a wonderful cure in her case. This friend pressed me hard to try them, so I sent for a box. You could scarcely imagine now the condition I was in at that time or realise what a marvellous change Bile Beans have made in me. They cleared away the headache and noises quickly, made me feel in the best of spirits, brought back my appetite, my flesh, and clearness of skin, in fact they have now built me up into quite a healthy happy woman. How many I've taken I can't tell you as I've given a lot away. They are so wonderful a medicine I can't resist giving them to anyone I see suffering, and I know I've done a lot of good in making them known.

There is an old lady neighbour of ours who is nearly eighty, and who would doubtless have been in her grave now but for my giving her some Bile Beans. She was very low down, and now she's so cheerful she seems likely to be among us for years yet."

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SERIAL STORY.

probably never come to a trial. I suspect that the police have no real clue to go upon. If they do secure a capture, there will, of course, be a hearing at petty sessions before the trial proper, and you will have to come north for that. But I should not, if I were you, tie myself here to avoid what is an improbable journey. As for me, Lintot will see that I don't starve."

"And Mr. Jerome," queried Lady Tarleton, drily.

The explorer suppressed a smile.

"Jerome is settling down on to a book also," said Edward Stormont, "or so I understand. He is to republish his war-correspondence, with notes and a preface. So both of us will be able to work quietly and entertain one another between times. Though if both you and Irene flit he may not elect to stay." And the explorer chuckled.

Lady Tarleton frowned. "I prefer that he should," she retorted; "Irene is quite sufficiently enamoured of muscle and daring as it is. She might get into a dangerously silly mood if this soldier-scribbler went on making eyes at her. And, as you know, she is practically betrothed to Guy Vanbrugh."

"Is she," said Edward Stormont; "well, my dear Adeline, marry your daughter to please yourself. If I had a daughter, and Jerome took a fancy to her, I should give them both my blessing. He is a sterling good fellow, and could be trusted to retain permanently both a woman's love and respect. Not that I've a word to say against Guy. I wish I had a son like him. If Irene were mine she should choose for herself."

He shook a pile of manuscript into order, noting slyly the dark sneer that crossed his sister-in-law's features.

"But a truce to these romantic problems," he added. "I shall stay on at Groudle and keep Jerome, if he will let me. Yet you must consider yourself free to get back to town, or, if you like that better, abroad. But I'll wager you, should Jerome be really in earnest about Irene he will haunt her in London or Paris as easily as here."

The explorer laughed mischievously, and Lady Tarleton shrugged her shoulders. "That is as it may be," she rejoined, "but I don't think I shall remain at Groudle, for many reasons."

"I shall be sorry to lose you," said Edward Stormont politely, "but no doubt we shall soon meet in London, especially if Jerome decides not to give me his company."

Lady Tarleton's brows knitted, but she evaded further discussion of the subject.

"I am not certain precisely when I shall return to town," she answered, "but probably it will be within the next few days. Groudle has completely got on my nerves."

Her brother-in-law rose to open the door for her. Then for the first time, he noticed her pale cheeks and drawn features.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, "I believe you are right. You are looking quite hipped and off-colour. And yet I'll be sworn a morning's shopping in town would pull you round. How you women do miss your beloved Bond Street. But there, to speak seriously, Davenal's death must have given you rather a nasty shock."

"Bond Street and Davenal apart," said Lady Tarleton coldly, "Cumberland has never suited me. I haven't Irene's rude health or your cast-iron constitution. Well, the afternoon is slipping away, and I will leave you to your work."

With a glance at the clock on the mantel, Lady Tarleton quitted the library, and directed her steps towards her boudoir.

At the foot of the stairs she came face to face with her daughter. Irene was dressed in the hard felt hat and dark habit of the English horsewoman, and she was singing a snatch of her song about the Scottish gentleman who went to war and returned home again to his lady love.

Her mother barred her way, to regard her disapprovingly.

"Irene," she remarked, "I wish you wouldn't sing about the house—it is so school-girlish. And, by-the-bye, you may be interested to know that we go back to town shortly. Your uncle will probably remain with this newspaper friend of his. But I must get home to Portland Place and civilised society."

She had fired her bolt with characteristic suddenness and brutality, and, with a cruel little smile, passed on. But she had marked the swift pallor that whitened momentarily the roses of Irene's cheeks. They flushed again, slightly, and Irene herself pursued her own way in a stern assumption of indifference. But her step was slower and nothing more was heard of the song with which she had begun the descent of the stair.

"The little fool cares for him," muttered Lady Tarleton, "or, what is as bad, she thinks she does. I must cut that knot, and, if possible, get Guy to town, away from——"

She stopped, reflected an instant, and turned from the stair-foot to the hall-door. It was open, and Irene had just mounted the tall brown hack—the groom was about to spring to his own saddle. Lady Tarleton went to her daughter's stirrup.

"Irene," she said, "you might ride round by the Close and ask Guy to dine with us before we go to town. Say to-morrow, or even to-night."

Irene gathered up her reins.

"I'm not going that way, mamma," she replied calmly, "and yet, as it happens, I am bound on Guy's business, something he asked me to do. You will have to find another messenger."

Lady Tarleton's face relaxed.

"Oh," she observed tolerantly, "may I ask the nature of your commission?"

"I am going to pay a call," said her daughter, "on a little *protégée* of his—the girl who did that beautiful piano-screen. She is quite an artist, Guy says, and we ought to take an interest in her, for she is actually a niece of poor Davenal's. I set this afternoon apart to go and see her."

She bent from her saddle to add a subdued sentence.

"As a matter of fact," she said, "I believe Guy is sweet on her, if the truth were told."

And having, with this stab, paid her mother handsomely, Irene shook her hack into a trot and rode off before Lady Tarleton could reply.

A sinister cloud settled on her mother's features. Lady Tarleton was looking across the park in the direction of the glade where, within sight of the Lennox mausoleum, she had held a certain grim colloquy with Dennis Hartigan.

TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

"That Name was Moira."

"How clever you are! Do you know, Miss Davena, if I were not going back to London any day now, I should ask you to give me some lessons."

Irene Tarleton laid down the pieces of finished and unfinished ribbon-work she had been examining, and glanced about her.

"What a quaint, delightful room," she said, "this is the sort of place that I should like to live in. Some day, when I am my own mistress, I am going to have a cottage in the country and spend no end of time there, far from London seasons and scandal, and shopping, and all the things that one is supposed to live for."

"I—I should be very glad to show you how to do the ribbon-work," answered Moira gravely, passing over the other's outburst of confidence; "it is very easy—all but the designs, and most people prefer to buy those."

Her visitor laughed and gathered up the folds of a voluminous habit.

"I'm afraid," Moira was told, "that I really should not have the patience to learn to do it really well, Miss Davenal, and I hate to botch things. So possibly it is just as fortunate I am not staying in Groudle. But I'm glad to have met you, I'm sure. If you can design like that, you ought to be painting

(*Continued on page* 604.)

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instead of doing fancy-work. Guy says you're a born artist, and now I've seen you I believe him."

Moira blushed.

"Sir Guy doesn't judge my work very critically, I fear, Miss Tarleton," she responded evasively, "but it was kind of you to come and see me. Sir Guy told me about you when he ordered the piano-screen, and I took quite an interest in doing it for you."

Irene's eyes sparkled.

"Oh," she said, "and what did he tell you about me? That I am a tom-boy and knockabout, trying to pretend I'm not grown up? That he and I have always been the best of friends, till our people wanted to make us something more, and we decided we knew better than they did? That I have a designing mother whom I have to bully unmercifully and that, as a consequence, I am in perpetual hot water? Did he tell you all this?"

"Miss—Miss Tarleton," stammered Moira, but Irene only laughed the more.

"Oh, it would all have been true," she said; "however, I suppose I mustn't take it for granted he was quite so confidential. Good-bye, for the present," she added, "the world is a small place, and I have a presentiment we shall see more of one another. I think you and I would get on famously."

Moira accepted the extended hand—it clasped hers warmly. Then, with a nod, and a little wave of her whip, Irene stepped out of Hawthorn Cottage to mount and ride off, her groom at her heels. She looked back to smile and nod again at the girlish figure that had followed her to the garden wicket.

As Moira stood, pondering the significance of Irene Tarleton's conspicuous friendliness, some one passed before her. She glanced up, saw Dennis Hartigan, and retreated. He entered the wicket, throwing away the end of a strongly-smelling cigar.

"Well," he inquired, "and how is the dad?"

"Getting on nicely," said Moira; "I will ask nurse if he is to have any visitors to-day."

The ex-steward checked her with a gesture as she went towards the cottage.

"Never mind," he answered, "I didn't come to see John—it's you I want a chat with."

Moira had gained the threshold of the little hall; she paused and the vaguely repellent air with which she had addressed him became more marked.

"I'm afraid I'm rather busy, Mr. Hartigan," she said; "you see I am dad's housekeeper, and while he is ill I have a great deal to do. The nurse is very kind, of course, but nurses have to be made comfortable."

Dennis Hartigan lounged on the step of the cottage, fingering his peaked cap.

"You're dad's housekeeper, are you," he repeated; "now that's not as true as it would be if you put it another way. You are John Davenal's housekeeper, and I'll be bound you're a good as well as a pretty one. But you don't keep house for your dad, because——"

He stooped to peer into her face.

"Because," he said, "John Davenal isn't your father, and well he knows it. And you know it, too," he added slowly, "or so I understood from John when he and I had a chat a day or two ago. But there's something you don't know—something you went diving the other evening near the breakwater to try and find out."

Moira was gazing at him with wide, penetrating eyes. Perceiving, by instinct, the ex-steward to be coarse, brutal, and dissipated, she had disliked him from the first, and to discover him on a sudden intimately acquainted with her and her doings troubled and bewildered her.

"I don't see," she parried, "how you can tell what I know or what I don't. And if dad told you more than he has told me, he has reasons for it, and I prefer to wait until he chooses to tell me what there is to tell himself."

Dennis Hartigan made a grimace.

"There are things John Davenal isn't certain of," he said, "and it's those that touch the heart of the matter."

"Then how do you know them if he doesn't?" queried Moira bluntly.

The ex-steward grinned.

"I didn't say I did know them," he rejoined, "but I'm a rare hand at piecing a tangled skein. And, besides, there's such a thing as a lucky hint. By chance I've lighted on a track that may lead us to the truth. Come here."

He beckoned her out of the porch, and from the step of the cottage pointed to a barque lying in the outer bay. Her sails were shaken out and the blue peter, the signal of her approaching departure on a voyage, was flying at her fore.

"In that ship," said the ex-steward, regarding her with a fierce craftiness out of the corner of a bloodshot eye, there is a sailor, booked for a trip to Valparaiso—the barque sails in an hour or two. This morning he is probably sober, last night he was drunk—drunk at the Half Brick Inn, where I was having some supper. When the wine is in, boys, then the wit is out."

Moira looked at the speaker with a kind of impatience.

"Well," she asked.

Hartigan laid a hand on hers.

"Now I've found out what set you diving by the breakwater," he pursued; "it was Kit—I know that yarn of hers about the drunken sailor and his 'This is out far enough—over with it.' Though what made either you or John connect that with your arrival in Groudle I don't know."

Moira's face showed him that he had hit some part of the target at which he had aimed. He tapped her hand significantly.

"My drunken sailor," he said, "was, it appears, all one with Kit's, and thanks to his loose jaws and the Half Brick liquor I can tell you what was thrown over—a little coffin, empty, and with a name on it. That name was Moira."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Moira, breathlessly "but what else—Moira who?"

Hartigan shook his head.

"That's what I couldn't get out of him," he said, "but you might have better luck—sailors have a weakness for a pretty face. I did try to see him again this morning, but he had gone aboard and his ship is on the point of sailing. How would it be if——"

He stole another anxious glance at her.

"If I was to run you aboard of her," he added; "for—half an hour?"

(To be continued.)

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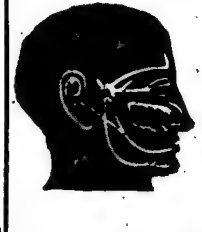

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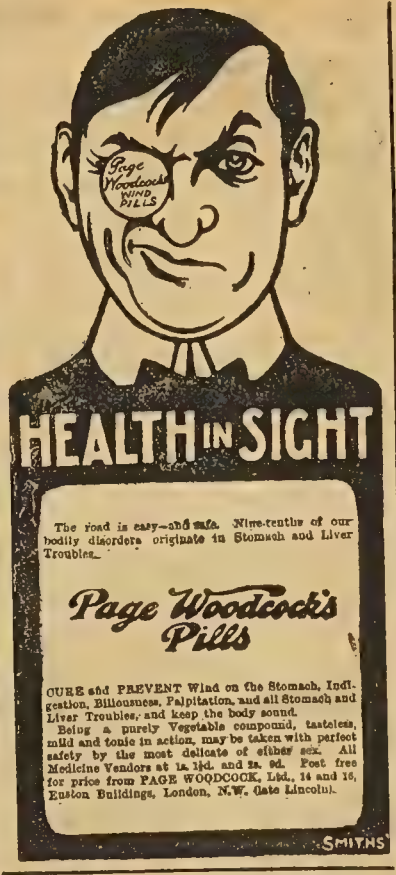

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What was the Difference?

He: "You haven't a mind above a new hat." She: "And you haven't any mind under yours."

What an Insult.

"I suppose you've never been kissed by a man before?" he said. "Do I look as plain as all that?" she demanded haughtily.

Fond of Arms.

Clara: "I see Cynthia had decorated her room with guns, pistols, swords, and the like." Cora: "Yes, she always has been a great girl for having arms about her."

No Cloak Needed Then.

She: "There are people who use religion as a cloak." He: "I know it." "What will they do in the next world, do you think?" "Oh, they won't need any cloak there."

She Knew Something.

"I have one request to make," said the pretty typine, when she had accepted her employer's proposal of marriage. "Name it, my love." "Let me select my successor at the desk."

Very Temperate Man.

Grimsby: "So you want to marry my daughter, sir! What are your principles? Are you temperate?" Fledgely: "Temperate! Why, I am so strict that it gives me pain even to find my boots tight."

Both Had Changed.

She: "It is ten years to-day since we were married. I notice a great change in you. You don't kiss me any more. You are not like what you used to be." He: "Well, you see, that comes from you, too, not being like what you used to be."

Spelt His Name Wrong.

She: "What makes you look so sad?" He: "I had hoped to be able to make my name go echoing through the halls of Time." She: "Yes?" He: "Well, after many efforts I've just succeeded in getting it into the papers, but, confound them, they've spelt it wrong!"

Mental, not Sentimental.

"I have to help Johnny with his mental arithmetic every evening," said the young woman, "and it is a nuisance." "Do you—er—find that celebrated problem about one plus one equals one?" asked the young man. "I said mental arithmetic, not sentimental," said the young woman, with great dignity.

Not the Only Lunatic.

"Did you read this, dear?" said Mrs. Grigsby to Orlando the other night. "It's a strange case. A harmless lunatic imagines that he's a grain of corn, and will not go into the yard lest a chicken eat him. Isn't it an odd delusion?" "Oh, the world's full of such delusions, dear," said Grigsby. "I know a harmless lunatic who seems to imagine that she's a piece of cheese, and she will fly from a room when a mouse enters it for fear the little creature will devour her."

A Real Bargain Sale.

He: "I only pay a shilling an hour for this boat." She: "That's why I like it. It's a regular bargain sail."

What Had Dropped.

Mamma: "Alice, what happenedlas t evening? I thought I heard something drop in the drawing-room." Alice: "I think Mr. Templeton fell in love with me."

She Could Measure His Pocket.

Her Rival: "Of course you can't measure his heart by the size of the diamond in your engagement ring." She of the ring: "No, but I can measure his pocket by it."

Such a Thoughtful Girl.

Clara: "She is an awfully thoughtful girl." Tom: "Indeed?" Clara: "Yes; she has trimmed her new theatre hat with a pair of opera-glasses for the use of the gentleman who sits behind her."

They Parted as Friends.

"What a hold Maud seems to have on all her rejected suitors." "Why shouldn't she, the artful thing? She always tells a man, when she refuses him, that she is afraid to marry a handsome man because she would be so jealous."

He Liked the Musician.

"Are you fond of music?" asked a stranger of the young man at the concert, who was applauding vigorously after a pretty girl had sung in a very painful way. "Not particularly," said the young man frankly, "but I'm exceedingly fond of the musician."

The One Who Guessed Lowest.

"You see, it was this way. They were all three so much in love with her and all so eligible, that to settle the matter she agreed to marry the one who should guess the nearest to her age." "And did she?" "I don't know. I know that she married the one who guessed the lowest."

It Wasn't Cheap.

Aged Husband: "You are going to ruin me with your extravagance. You don't need that cape any more than a cat needs two tails. How often have I told you never to buy anything because it is cheap?" Young Wife (with an air of one who has got the better of the argument): "But it was not cheap; it cost ten guineas!"

A Difficult Question.

She was a bride of only three short months, but she had her troubles, and naturally made a confidante of her mother. "My dear child," said the mother, "if you would have neither eyes nor ears when your husband comes home late from the club you might be happier." "Perhaps so," answered the young wife, with an air of weariness, "but what am I to do with my nose?"

Not what was Expected.

"Naomi," he said softly, as he gazed at the moon above them, "isn't the evening beautiful? Do you know, strange fancies throng my mind on a night like this. Every zephyr seems to bear gentle voices, perhaps from the spirit world. Do you hear such voices?" Silence for a moment. "I think I do, George." "What do they sound like to you?" "They are very indistinct, but they make me think that papa and brother Henry are calling the dog."

The Old Man's Sorrow.

"You have a daughter, have you not, sir?" said a minister to an old gentleman, with whom he had formed a casual acquaintance as a fellow-passenger. The old gentleman essayed to answer, but the question had strangely affected him. "I beg your pardon," said the minister, "if I have thoughtlessly awakened in your mind recollections of a painful nature. The world is full of sorrow, sir, and perhaps my question recalls to your memory a fair, beautiful girl, whose blossoming young life had withered in its bloom. Am I right, sir?" "No, not exactly," replied the old gentleman, sadly; "I have five unmarried darters, mister, an' the youngest of the lot is twenty-eight years old."

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A Honeymoon Cloud.

"JAMES" was at a seaside watering-place the other day, and met an old college friend, who invited him to dinner, adding, "I'd like you to meet the wife." It appeared that the friend was newly married, and was in fact on his honeymoon. "JAMES" accepted the invitation. While at dinner, he made himself as agreeable as possible to both his friend and his wife, and on leaving thought he had made quite a good impression on the latter from a social point of view.

* * * * *

Later on he thought to return the hospitality, and invited the young couple to dine with him. In reply he had a curt refusal. On inquiry it turned out that "JAMES'" politeness to his wife had deeply offended his friend, his motives having been entirely mistaken. What can "JAMES" do in the matter? He says he was only agreeable to the girl in a social sense, and had no idea whatever of trying to attract her.

* * * * *

Of course, "JAMES," you do not know exactly that your friend has taken offence with you for the reason stated. It is only hearsay. If so, he must be an exceedingly foolish man, who evidently has very little confidence in his friends. You had better write him a nice letter, expressing your disappointment that the couple cannot accept your invitation, add a word of appreciation for their hospitality and let the matter drop. Young married couples are frightfully sensitive in such matters and it requires a very tactful man to avoid causing jealousy.

* * * * *

And, in future, when you again meet a young married couple in their honeymoon stage, have as little to do with them socially as you possibly can. Nine chances out of ten you will arouse the jealousy of one or the other, and probably without the slightest reason.

❦❦❦

Unfriendly Sisters.

"FREDA" is engaged and has been introduced to her sweetheart's family. His sisters, however, clearly show that they do not care for her, though she has made herself as agreeable as she could. It looks as though they wish to drive her to break off the match.

* * * * *

You should reply by showing your devotion to be unbreakable. That is an argument even unfriendly sisters cannot resist, and is the only one in your case. When they see that neither you nor their brother have even a thought of breaking off, they will soon come round, and in a very short time will try to make themselves agreeable. They will see that such bickerings must cease, or they will alienate their brother.

The New Venus and Adonis.

How is a man to know when a girl is paying attention to him? "S. D." has been meeting a girl for some little time, but has not made any overtures to her. She, however, never loses an opportunity of speaking to him, and hinting at future meetings.

* * * * *

It looks as though she is fond of you, and not backward in wishing to show it. Be careful, though there is no reason for you to be stand-offish. Take up the attitude of a friend, but avoid committing yourself, unless you are really fond of her yourself.

❦❦❦

Women Can't Get on with Him.

I HAVE a gloomy letter from "WEARY," who is thirty-three years old. He complains of the attitude of women towards him. They are cool, and sometimes rude. Any politeness he shows is seldom appreciated, and it seems as though his liking for the society of the sex is evaporating. Can I recommend him a cure for this morbid state?

* * * * *

Probably you are not in good health. A disordered liver often creates in men all sorts of delusions as to the attitude of others towards themselves. That, however, is for you and your doctor to decide. As to your relations with women, if you find you are growing weary of them, why not give the sex a rest altogether for a while?

* * * * *

Both you and the ladies may benefit by an interval. Try a few weeks with your male friends. No man should allow his thoughts to concentrate too much on the opposite sex. Probably you have neglected other men, and therefore lost sight of the consoling influence of friendship.

❦❦❦

The Lonely Girl.

"ADA" lives in a quiet country town with an exacting parent. She gets no society at all, and scarcely knows any other girls, much less any members of the male sex. She is twenty, and has not seen any life at all, as her parent will not hear of her accepting invitations to stay with friends. She feels that she is growing gloomy and despondent. What can I suggest to her?

* * * * *

Take plenty of exercise, long walks, cycling, and read as many light and amusing books as you can. Cultivate music or some hobby to distract your thoughts. One of these days something—or somebody—will turn up which will give you the chance you need. Meanwhile, don't let yourself get despondent. It spoils the complexion. I know that will appeal to you probably more than any moralising from me. Besides, young men *do* come to country towns, and when they see a girl who attracts them, they usually find some way to make her acquaintance.

❦❦❦

To Turn Friendship Into Love.

So you are in great perplexity, "X. Y. Z." You are on friendly terms with a gentleman, but you feel more than friendship towards him. How can you attain your desires?

* * * * *

I suppose if he also feels more than friendship towards you he will show it in some way. I should try to give him the opportunity by seeing him as often as possible, without, of course, appearing to throw yourself at him. You may have developed the stronger feelings a little earlier than he has, in which case you will have to wait until he catches you up. Real love usually arrives before mere friendship has had a chance to look in. But there are exceptions, and I hope your own case is one of them.

Cynthia

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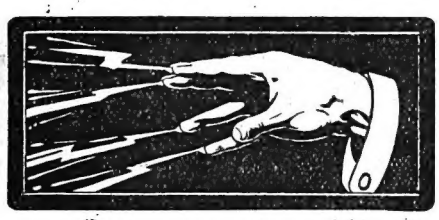

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